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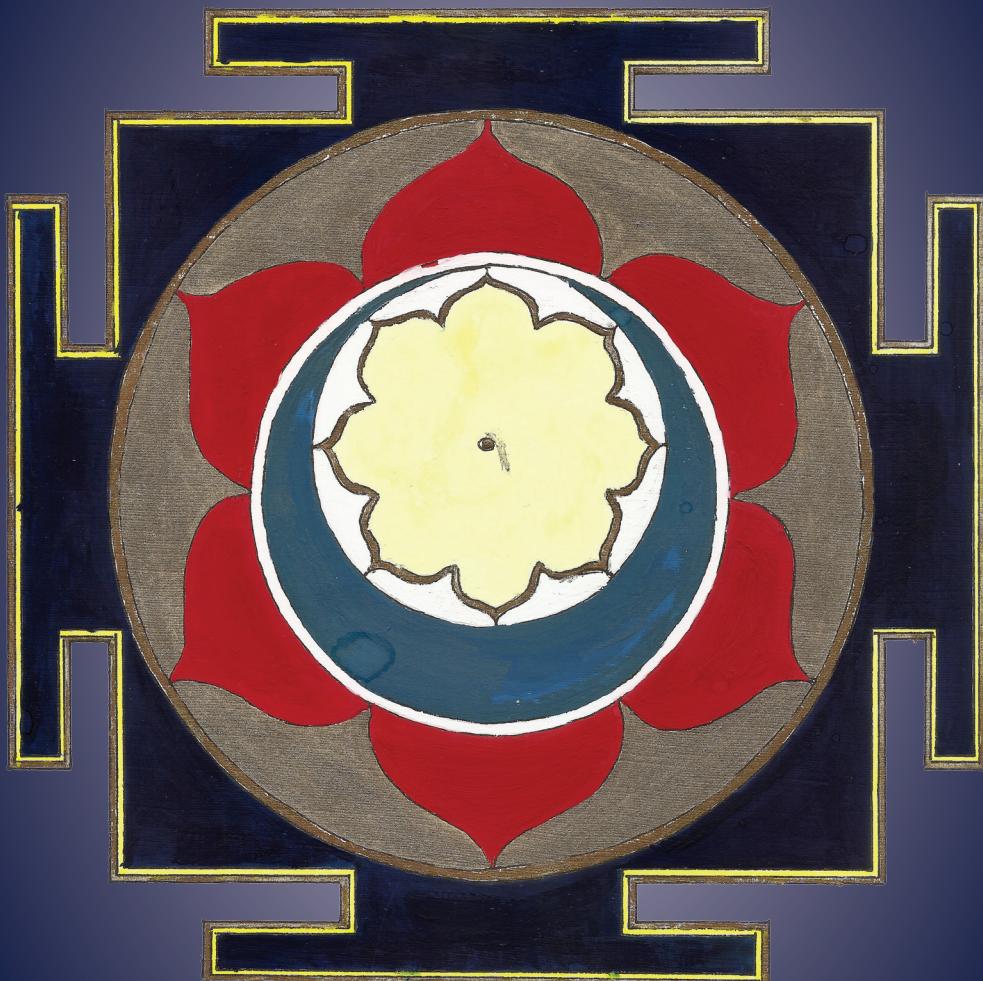
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The Mystagogic Process of The Book of Privy Counseling

A hermeneutic narrative research



Marianne J.P. Sommers

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**The Mystagogic process
of
*The Book of Privy Counseling***

A hermeneutic narrative research in the Mystagogic process of
The Book of Privy Counseling

Proefschrift

**ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
op gezag van de rector magnificus prof. dr. Th.L.M. Engelen,
volgens besluit van het college van decanen
in het openbaar te verdedigen op vrijdag 30 januari 2015
om 14.30 uur precies**

door

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geboren op 18 augustus 1959
te Elsendorp (gemeente Gemert)**

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Preface

The anonymous fourteenth century author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* can be considered as a reliable mystical guide. This anonymous British author, a mystic, a theologian, a “director of souls”, stands in ‘the full stream of the Western spiritual tradition’.¹

The Book of Privy Counseling is the first written counsel in Western literature. In the fourteenth century there were several mystical literary works, but none of them contained a counsel in which a lively mystical dialogue took place.

The counsel literally draws its reader into the living experiences of its inner dynamic processes. It offers the opportunity for literally taking part in the dialogue and moving along with the main characters, the monk and the novice, in the mystical dynamic process. As a reader it is impossible to keep a spiritual or emotional distance from the counsel since one has to take part and to be totally involved to accomplish the mystical process. In the course of the counsel the reader has the opportunity to mature, to grow spiritually into contemplation and to become part of the counsel, transforming from a reading novice into a responding monk. This unique experience will be enlightened throughout this thesis.

This thesis has not only been accomplished by my own exertions. I am eternally grateful to Prof. Dr Toine van den Hoogen and Prof. Dr Hein Blommestijn, who supported me with incredible patience in my research. Also warm thanks to Dr Marko Sturm who has been a great patient support in making the lay-out, editing the whole thesis and advising the right publisher. I cordially thank Drs Annemarie Emmen, who kindly advised me in formulation issues and for her warm enthusiastic interest in the subject. Also great thanks to Pierre-Paul Walraet, O.S.C., who has read along in the thesis, advising me in references to the psalms and to St. Augustine of Hippo, sharing our faith experiences and spiritual insights in the light of the mystical way in *The Book of Privy Counseling*. Finally: warm thanks to Drs Hans Schellekens for his reading along in the Dutch version giving his view on the mystical way in *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

I warmly dedicate my work to my mother Hanneke and my father Antoon†, to my husband Hans and our daughters Hannelore and Elianne, to my brothers and sisters, to our dear friend Sjef van den Nieuwenhof and of course to those who might feel attracted towards reading this “monk’s” work.

¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, New York, London, Toronto, a.o. USA, Image Books Doubleday, 1973, p.7

“Conseille me, Kynde (*Nature*),” quod I, “what craft be best to learn?”
“Lerne to love,” quod Kynde, “and leef alle othere”²

“You are uncertain what is best for yourself, but do as I tell you now”.³

Boxmeer, 10 december 2014

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M.J.P. Sommers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "M.J.P." followed by "Sommers".

Marianne J.P. Sommers

² McGinn, B. ‘The English Mystics’, in: *Christian Spirituality, High Middle Ages and Reformation* Ed. J. Raitt, London: World Spirituality, 17, 1987, p. 194, Cf Langland, W. *The Vision of Pierce Plowman*, 1330-1400, B Text, Passus XX, lines 20.207-208

³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 153

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Introduction

*‘Those in search of a mystical guide could do no better than turn to the anonymous fourteenth century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*’.⁴ This author can be considered as a reliable mystical guide, ‘a mystic, a theologian, a director of souls, who stands in the full stream of the Western spiritual tradition’.⁵*

To emphasise the literary importance of the author of *Privy Counseling* it is stated that he was ‘a writer of considerable literary talent, who composed three translations and four original treatises’⁶: *Hid Divinity; Benjamin Minor, The Study of Wisdom; A treatise of Discerning of Spirits; The Epistle of Prayer; The Epistle of Discretion; The Cloud of Unknowing* and finally *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

Johnston has dealt with the author’s two principle works: *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*. He translated both works from the original medieval texts into modern British English.

According to William Johnston *The Book of Privy Counseling* is in many ways a book of counselling as we understand this word today. ‘It is the work of a man who is friendly, anxious to give help and counsel – a man endowed with a keen psychological insight, who knows the human mind, who is aware of man’s tragic capacity for self-deception and yet is endowed with a delicate compassion for those who suffer as they struggle to remain in silent love at the core of their being’.⁷

In his introduction Johnston expresses his conviction that “the readers who surrender themselves to the author’s mystical charm will find in their very perusal a truly contemplative experience”.⁸

The Book of Privy Counseling was specifically written for a young disciple, on the one hand, and generally meant for all those on the threshold of the highest form of contemplative life, on the other. It was written as an instruction of how to be ‘knit to God in spirite & in oneheed of loue & accordaunce of wile’.⁹ Perfect oneness with God, which is the aim of the contemplative, is to know God, not objectively as a being to be analysed

⁴ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p.7

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Idem., p. 8

⁸ Idem., p. 7

⁹ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1944, p. lii

and understood in all His parts, but subjectively, as a divine force working in and through the soul, the soul moving only in God.

To introduce this thesis on the hermeneutic narrative research in the mystagogic process of *The Book of Privy Counseling* its historical background and context will be described in part 1.

Part 1 informs the reader of the time and location of 14th century mystical literary history. Moreover, as *The Book of Privy Counseling* is a mystical work, the mystical tradition of Great Britain's 14th century will be briefly discussed. *The Book of Privy Counseling*, as the central core of attention within this thesis, will be introduced and briefly discussed and some relevant issues will be paid attention to, such as: the counsellor's approaches within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the author's assumptions and references to the Western Biblical tradition and finally the uniqueness of *The Book of Privy Counsel*.

Part 2 deals with the research design of the research into the mystagogic process within *The Book Privy Counseling*. In this part the research question will be defined.

In order to get a more profound understanding of which mystical and narrative dynamics arise between the author and the reader, the research aims at revealing the internal structure of the Book of Privy Counseling by analysing the mystical communicative relationships between the protagonist, personified by the monk and the antagonist, personified by the novice on the one hand and the communicative relation between a concrete author who communicates with God and who lets God talk to the reader on the other hand. The novice speaks through the counsellor. All (parties involved) together reveal the mystical- and narrative dynamical structure.

The research design shows the following phases which will be dealt with in the subsequent parts:

Part 3 encompasses a mystical dynamic hermeneutic close reading. Hermeneutics is being understood as 'the most essential level of close reading'.¹⁰ In the spiritual hermeneutic reading the research tries to come to the core, the deeper meaning, of the text.¹¹ In other words: hermeneutics will be applied as the reading method to get a fundamental understanding of how God works in *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

¹⁰ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Leuven, Peeters, 2002, p. 412

¹¹ Idem, p. 704

Part 4 deals with a narrative dynamic reading, since it is the narrative dynamic process which draws the parties involved into the deeper layers of spiritual mystical being. The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* has been able to guide the novice through the mystical dynamic process by his way of counselling. This way of counselling includes a narrative method to guide the novice-reader. By and in the narration the author has managed to put a mystical dynamic process into motion. This way of counselling can also be indicated as the accompanying way, or spiritual mystical guidance.

Part 5 creates a synthesis by indicating the mystagogic implications. The mystical and narrative dynamic reading approaches reveal the inner logic of the counsel to the reader in order to stimulate awareness of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. The counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystagogic implications of being, the mystagogic implications of the discernment of spirits and the mystagogic implications of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the counsel and from the perspective of the reader. Therefore this part will deal with the three stages seen from both perspectives.

In part 6 the conclusions will be drawn.

In the appendices the original Middle English text (Harleian MSS. 674, British museum) and the modern English Translation of *The Book of Privy Counseling* by William Johnston (1974) are enclosed.

This thesis will concentrate on the narrative dynamics and it will not enter into theological discussions of sources or into the medieval context of the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* and his other works.

It is important to note that within this thesis the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* will be addressed as 'the author' and as 'he'. The novice-reader will be addressed as 'she'.

Moreover it is superfluous to state that 'he' or 'she', 'him' or 'her' are interchangeable, so that every reader, male or female, is offered the opportunity to empathize with any party involved in this thesis.

1. The Book of Privy Counseling

1.1 The Book

The Book of Privy Counseling is unique. It is the first written counsel in Western Literature. The reader can actually take part in the counsel e.g. as a novice, who places herself in the position of someone going her mystical way towards union under the guidance of the author who reveals himself as the monk. *The Book of Privy Counseling* is not only a mystical guidance; it is a vivid mystical counsel in the form of a virtual dialogue.

According to Bernard McGinn some have claimed that 'Hilton was the author of the treatise known as *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*, but theological and stylistic differences make this unlikely'.¹² The author of *The Cloud* and *The Book of Privy Counseling* seems to be a contemporary of Hilton. It is highly likely that the author lived as a solitary. He was possibly a Carthusian who had received a good theological education, and who was a genius as a guide to the spiritual life. However, it is not completely sure that this author was a man. In those times a growing number of female Carthusian monks wrote mystical literature either in Latin or in the vernacular. Female vernacular theology was a subspecies of medieval vernacular religious literature. Gender distinctions are less basic to literary or religious classification than distinctions of Latin versus vernacular, religious versus secular, and medieval versus some other time period. "Women's spirituality" and "men's spirituality" are very much the same'.¹³

In *Anchoress and Cardinal Julian of Norwich and Adam Easton*, Julia Bolton Holloway assumes that the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* might be Cardinal Adam Easton, O.S.B.¹⁴

The Book of Privy Counseling analyses the "naked intent" that leads to God and the nature of the union possible in this life. 'Pure existence' is the most proper name of God; the author insists that God is the being of the soul, "evermore saving this difference between you and Him, that He is your

¹² McGinn, B. 'The English Mystics', 1987, p. 199

¹³ Renevey, D. and Whitehead, C. *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, pp. xi, 270. Consulted May 1, 2014. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Writing+Religious+084542766>

¹⁴ Bolton Holloway, J. 'Anchoress and Cardinal Julian of Norwich and Adam Easton, O.S.B.' *Analecta Cartusiana*, Eds. Dr James Hogg, A. Girard, D. Le Blévec, Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2008 (35:20, Volume 20)

being and you are not His”.¹⁵ Some of the language used here resembles the Rhineland mystics, but this author, like the other English mystics, never allows abstract terminology to dominate, as when he orders his reader to “*take the good, gracious God as he is, plat (flat) and plain as a plaster, and lay it to your sick self as you are*”.¹⁶

‘*The Book of Privy Counseling*’s claim that thoughts on the passion pertain to common grace, not to a higher special grace of contemplation, needs to be understood in the light of the traditional distinction between the “carnal” love of Christ’s humanity and the higher “spiritual” love of the Godhead made manifest in him’.¹⁷

William Johnston made an effort to ‘make the author’s thought available and intelligible to the modern reader’.¹⁸ As a basis he used the critical text of Phyllis Hodgson.¹⁹ William Johnston states that ‘he has only once departed from this text’.²⁰ This is at the end of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. This last part is not found in Professor Hodgson’s edition but it is found, however, in some late manuscripts. Johnston added another part, which he did not account for, at the end of chapter 19, concluding that ‘as the two signs of contemplation, one interior and one exterior, agree, one may rely on them as proof that God is calling to enter within and begin a more intense life of Grace’.²¹

As far as known there were ten different manuscripts of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. One of them is Harleian MSS. 674, which can be found in the British Museum. Phyllis Hodgson concludes that ‘the examination of the phonology and grammatical forms of the different manuscripts has shown that the language of Har 1(Harleian) is the most consistent. The few differences in the other manuscripts from the general development of the vowels and consonants in Har1 indicate that the basis of the language in all the manuscripts is fundamentally the same’.²² She states that ‘If it is reasonable to assume that the common basis of the language is that of the author’s original text, then the logical deduction is that Har1 best represents the language of the original. The basis of the language in all the manuscripts is that of an East Midland dialect’.²³ Phyllis Hodgson has

¹⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 150

¹⁶ Idem, p. 153

¹⁷ McGinn, B. ‘The English Mystics’, 1987, p. 202

¹⁸ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 31

¹⁹ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1944

²⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 31-32

²¹ Idem, p. 183

²² Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, 1944, p. ix-xlix

²³ Idem, p. 1

ultimately decided to choose ‘Harl as the basic text’.²⁴ Though the basis of her Middle English edition of *The Book of Privy Counseling* ‘was a full collation of all the known manuscripts, which were found to fall into clearly defined groups’.²⁵ The edition she has chosen, is a shortened form of two dissertations originally presented to the University of Oxford.²⁶

The MS. Harleian 674 was written on ‘parchment in a regular, early fifteenth-century court-hand; gathering in eights; single columns of text, elsewhere double columns, with an average of 32 lines to a column; leaves well ruled in ink, with vertical rulings to confine the columns of text; rubrics used abundantly for underlining, headings, marginal references, paragraph marks and capital; initial capitals in blue and red, with elaborate filigree work; cancellations in red ink’.²⁷

Johnston has dealt with the author’s two principle works: *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*. He translated both works from the original medieval texts into modern British English.

William Johnston retained the original title of *The Book of Privy Counseling* ‘*pE BOOK OF PRIUE COUNSELING*’ arguing that it “is more or less untranslatable”.²⁸ Moreover, the word “counseling” is meaningful for the people of today. In the original title the word ‘counseling’ is spelled out with one single ‘l’, nowadays the word ‘counselling’ is spelled out with a double ‘ll’. In this thesis, the word ‘counseling’ in the original title *The Book of Privy Counseling* will be spelled out with one single ‘l’. In the text the word ‘counselling’ will be spelled out with a double ‘ll’. As for the word “Privy” which implies that the book, or rather “letter”, is not for everyone but only for those who will understand, who are of “the same disposition”.²⁹ It also implies that ‘the contents are intimate and confidential’.³⁰

Contrary to the Middle English version William Johnston has divided his modern English translation of *The Book of Privy Counseling* into chapters, but he does not use explicit titles.

The Cloud of Unknowing and *The Book of Privy Counseling* complement each other. The Cloud of Unknowing is well-known as a literary work, both in style and in message. It was widely read in the fourteenth century when it was written and it has never lost its place among the spiritual classics of

²⁴ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1944, p. xl - p. 1 (Harleian MSS. 674, British museum)

²⁵ Idem, p. v

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1944, p. ix-x

²⁸ Idem, p. 32

²⁹ Idem, p. 149

³⁰ Idem, p. 32

the English language. *The Book of Privy Counseling* is less famous. ‘It is the work of the author’s maturity. This makes it more difficult reading; but any loss of charm is more than compensated for by a theological precision, a spiritual depth, and a balanced authority that have come with years of profound experience. The contemplation the author teaches is of the highest value’.³¹

The Book of Privy Counseling gives a detailed reflection on *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which could also be called ‘The Cloud of Forgetting’ as the oblivion of our own being in order to centre on the being of God. The work of love is total forgetfulness of self.

William Johnston divided his modern English version of *The Book of Privy Counseling* into 24 chapters following the preface, called “foreword”. The chapters do not have titles; however, each chapter starts with a statement, an imperative or a reflective pronoun to link the following part to the previous and to draw the reader further into the contemplative reading process. William Johnston divided the book into chapters in order to improve readability “as if the text were divided more or less in the same way as *The Cloud of Unknowing*”.³² The text used by Phyllis Hodgson³³ is all of a piece divided into paragraphs.

The Book of Privy Counseling was written in the form of a letter in which the author directly addressed his novice as “My dear friend in God”. The genre and style of *The Book of Privy Counseling* is that of a letter. In those days letters were widespread means of transferring messages, even though they were of substantial size. *The Book of Privy Counseling* was written in a narrative interactive structure in which the author guides the reader through a spiritual process onto contemplation by means of a spiral narration.

It is quite common to use a spiral structure since *The Book of Privy Counseling* is a didactic work. It benefits from a clear construction in which repetitions and new additions form the structure of the spiritual process. Theories on spiral structures in narrativity describe how authors try to master the way in which old and new information can be integrated syntactically in linguistic expressions.³⁴

³¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 8

³² Idem, p. 32

³³ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing And The Book of Privy Counselling*, 1944 and Hodgson, Ph. ‘The Cloud of Unknowing and related Treatises’, *Analecta Cartusiana* 3 Ed.

Hogg, J., Salzburg, Austria, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1982

³⁴ Osborne, G.R. *The Hermeneutic Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical interpretation*, Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, second edition, 2006

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author uses the narrative present; he communicates with the novice/reader in a directive instructive way. It is written from the perspective of the author in a spiral structure reflecting on previously supplied information and anticipating what will follow afterwards. Linking Osborne's theory to the didactic structure of the counsel within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the researcher can state that this is a rather commonly used didactic structure in which repetitions and new additions are part of the process leading the reader further and deeper into contemplation.

Several translations have been published, e.g. the translations by A.C. Spearing (2001)³⁵, C.A. Butcher (2009)³⁶ and J. McCann (2014)³⁷ being the most recent ones. For this research the modern English version of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, by William Johnston,³⁸ is used to detect the mystical and narrative dynamics since, in the researcher's opinion, he has been able to keep the mystical layers of *The Book of Privy Counseling* intact.

Moreover, being a modern reader trying to reach other modern English readers, the researcher is explicitly concerned with the articulation of the mystical and narrative dynamics of the counsel. However, the Middle English version has been taken into account since it is the fundamental source. Therefore it is enclosed in the appendices.

1.2 Historical background of The Book of Privy Counseling

As far as known, four of the greatest writers of the English medieval mystical literature of the 14th century are: Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

Earlier English contributions had been delivered to medieval spirituality in the Latin writings of Bede and Aelred of Rievaulx or in such vernacular works as the 8th century poem "*The Dream of the Rood*" and the "*Ancrene Riwle*", a 13th century guide for women recluses. 'The remarkable flowering of spiritual literature in late medieval England was part of a

³⁵ Spearing, A.C., *The Cloud of Unknowing and other Works*, London, New York, Penguin Group, 2001

³⁶ Butcher, C.A. *The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel, A New Translation*, Boston Massachusetts, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2009

³⁷ McCann, J and Baker, A. *The Cloud of Unknowing and other treatises*, New Jersey, New York, Martino Fine Books, 2014

³⁸ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973

European-wide phenomenon, but there is no evidence that the major English authors were influenced by their continental contemporaries'.³⁹

It was in the 14th century that the possibility was initiated for laypersons in the secular world to reach the heights of perfection. This took place for the first time in medieval spirituality. Moreover, the role of the religious orders, especially the Carthusians, 'was to guide the souls in the production and dissemination of religious literature'.⁴⁰

The above mentioned English mystical authors are the best-known part of a large body of spiritual literature produced in late medieval England. They did not only translate the Bible into the vernacular but they also produced instructional manuals for parish priests. The practical character of the English mystics is not unrelated to the emphasis on the importance of sound instruction in living the Christian life. 'A wide range of vernacular devotional literature, both in prose and in poetry demonstrates the spread of concern for spirituality on all levels of society'.⁴¹ It is interesting to read in Bernard McGinn's writings that "the greatest monument of this literature is the late fourteenth-century poem "Piers Plowman" whose central message of redemption through the love of Christ is not different from that of the mystics:

"Conseille me, Kynde (Nature)," quod I, "what craft be best to learn?"
"Lerne to love," quod Kynde, "and leef alle othere".⁴²

Since all the English mystics place love at the heart of their message, it has been customary to speak of affectivity as one of the distinguishing features of English mysticism, in which the role of Jesus in his humanity had a prominent place. In addition, the following features played a distinguishing role as well: the relation of love and knowledge in the mystical life and the connection between action and contemplation.

The unknown author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* lived in England. He or she was a mystic, a theologian and as a theologian he belonged to the negative theology, or Apophatic Theology stating that God is best known by negation. He was a writer who composed four treatises and three translations: *The Epistle of Prayer*, *The Epistle of Discretion*; *Hid Divinity*;

³⁹ McGinn, B. 'The English Mystics', p. 194; Cf Langland, W. *The Vision of Pierce Plowman*, Passus XX, lines 20.207-8

⁴⁰ McGinn, B. 'The English Mystics', p. 194

⁴¹ Idem, p. 195

⁴² Idem, p. 207-208

Benjamin Minor, *The Study of Wisdom; A treatise of Discerning of Spirits; The Cloud of Unknowing* and finally *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The Book of Privy Counseling reveals the author's personal mystical experiences and typical fourteenth century speculative and affective mysticism. According to Phyllis Hodgson the author derived the teachings and exercises of contemplation from his own mystical experiences.

To Phyllis Hodgson it is not clear which degree of contemplation the author attained. He was able to describe spiritual processes accurately and vividly since he had a good insight into the workings of the mind and he was conscious of his own different mental states.⁴³

The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* belongs to a tradition known as "apophatic", because of its tendency to emphasise that God is best-known by negation. Influenced by Neo-Platonism, it is a doctrine that owes much to Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite.⁴⁴

Apophaticism, or negative theology, is an attempt to describe God by what cannot be said of Him. Many of the terms used to describe God's attributes bear an apophatic quality.⁴⁵

The most influential proponent of apophatic theology was Pseudo-Dionysius, who was often quoted in the *Summa Theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas. Apophatic theology is also prevalent in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and is seen as superior to positive, or cataphatic theology.

'The English author almost certainly did not read the original text of Dionysius but used the Latin translation of Joannes Sarracenus together with the commentary of Thomas Gallus, Abbot of Vercelli'.⁴⁶

Johnston states that 'Dionysius' basic ideas are fundamental to the thoughts of the author'⁴⁷ of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. According to Dionysius, there are 'two ways in which man can know God: one is the way of reason ($\lambda\delta\gamma\delta\zeta$); the other is the way of mystical contemplation ($\mu\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omega\theta\epsilon\alpha\mu\alpha$). Rational knowledge of God is obtained through speculative theology and philosophy. But mystical knowledge offers awareness of God that is intuitive and ineffable. It is called "mystical" or "hidden". Dionysius speaks of the transcendence of God, stressing the fact that by reasoning we know little about Him. Still, he never denies the power of discursive

⁴³ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv

⁴⁴ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 24

⁴⁵ Hector, K. 'Apophaticism in Thomas Aquinas: a re-formulation and recommendation' in: *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, 2007, p. 377-393.

⁴⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973 p. 25

⁴⁷ Ibid.

reasoning to give some knowledge of God. He emphasises ‘the superiority of mystical knowledge’.⁴⁸

According to Phyllis Hodgson the author was a priest and a trained theologian and the direction of his thoughts closely resembled those of other fourteenth century’s mystics such as Eckhart, Tauler and Ruusbroec.

His own mystical experiences formed the background of *Privy Counseling*. As the author was educated in the works of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church he naturally ‘shaped his thoughts according to the teaching of those writers who had most influenced him. Many of his turns of thought and phrase are traceable to known sources, but in their context they are so personal that one must assume that such borrowed expression best described his own mental and emotional experiences’.⁴⁹

The *Book of Privy Counseling* teaches the disciplining of the body and mind in an uninterrupted focus of all attention solely upon the being of God. ‘This work has a double aspect – the concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon one single point involves a strenuous effort of the will to clear away from the mind everything that is between God and the soul. The work describes the psychological difficulties at different stages of the work and it shows how they may be overcome’.⁵⁰

The author reflects on his own experiences in which he discovered that his discursive mind could never comprehend God, and its activities were a hindrance in the work of contemplation. ‘He needed then to silence its inquiries by concentrating all his intellectual powers in a straining towards one single point, God’.⁵¹

The most difficult discipline of the contemplative is to persevere with faith and in the feeling of her own being. ‘Without trying to know what he is, he must realise to the full *that* he is, for only then can he offer himself wholly to God’.⁵²

The experiences the author describes belong to one who has progressed farther along the mystical way. The state of consciousness described at the end of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, when the soul alternates between sharp consciousness of Grace and a feeling of emptiness and abandonment,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, 1944, p. li

⁵⁰ Idem, p. lii

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Idem, p. liv

is the condition of the contemplative on the very verge of the Unitive Life, life in union with God.

The author, whose thought in many ways resembles that of the German mystics of his time, continually repeats his warnings, emphasizing that God ‘is thy being and thou are not his’,⁵³ a theme developed at length in the beginning of *The Book Privy Counseling*.

The main theme of the author’s work is contemplation. He remained within the framework of the traditional teaching of the Church on contemplation and he was elucidated by direct borrowings to illustrate or explain.⁵⁴ He showed this by ‘openly acknowledging the chief influence of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: *this same work ... is Denis deuinite ... his listy derknes & his unknowing kunnynges*’.⁵⁵

The author does not recognize a ‘higher faculty than the reason and the will, and through the right working of these he taught that mystical union can take place’.⁵⁶ ‘He is very concerned with the burning question of grace. The whole progress of the soul towards God rests entirely upon grace. By Grace, man is called to the contemplative life. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the emphasis on Grace is reinforced by ‘a long interpolation showing how nothing can be done without God in any state of life, actively or contemplatively’.⁵⁷

‘The spiritual exercise, which was inspired by Dionysius, rests upon the belief in the absolute incomprehensibility of God. The English treatises contain the same argument, clearly stated in *De Divinis Nominibus*, that the natural faculties of intelligence are impotent to comprehend the being of God because God’s nature is essentially different from the nature of man’.⁵⁸

The highest achievement of the natural faculties just fail, any activity of the normal faculties is a hindrance in the prayer of contemplation; ‘any idea of God they give must necessarily be tainted with error’.⁵⁹

‘Although they lay repeated stress on the transcendence of God, both Dionysius and the English writer are careful to show why man’s soul is not

⁵³ *Idem*, p. lvii

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Idem*, p. lviii

⁵⁶ *Idem*, p. lvii

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Idem*, p. lix

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

irreconcilably separated from the being of God. God is immanent in all things as well as transcendent above them. God is the Unity embracing all things and sustaining all things in being.⁶⁰

As God is in all things, more than the total of all things, both Dionysius and the English writer would take the via negativa of contemplation. According to the Oxford dictionary ‘via negativa’ is a philosophical approach to theology which asserts that no finite concepts or attributes can be adequately used of God, but only negative terms. The normal faculties of intelligence attain to a more complete truth in the statement of what God is not than of what He is, by rejecting every mental conception of Him and denying Him any attribute. The ‘nakid entent stretching into God’ advocated in the English treatises, is a blind act of faith, ‘not clothed in any special thought of God in himself, how he is in himself or in any of his works, but only that he is as he is. The whole of the teaching on prayer in *The Book of Privy Counseling* is an exposition of the Dionysian doctrine that: ‘*the most ghoostly knowing of God is that, the wiche is knowyn bi unknowyng*’.⁶¹

To attain to union one must, by successive stages, purify one’s mind from every image, one must still the workings of the discursive reason, and lastly one must lose even the consciousness of her own separate existence. The practice is the same as that taught in Aquinas’ *De Mystica Theologia*:⁶²

*‘Et sensus derelinque et intellectuales operationes, et Omnia sensibilia et intelligibilia, et Omnia non exsistentia et exsistentia; et sicut est possibile, ignote consurge ad ejus unionem qui est super omnem substantiam et cognitionem. Etenim excessu tui ipsius et omnium irretentibili et absoluto, mundo ad supersubstantialem divinarum tenebrarum radium, cuncta auferens et a cunctis absolutus sursum ageris’.*⁶³

Reject the senses and intellectual activities, renounce all perceptible and understandable things, and all the non-existent and all that exists. And, as far as it is possible, rise up in this ignorant state in order to unite yourself with Him who exceeds all essence and knowledge. And so you will through [by means of] an irresistible and absolute transcendence of yourself and of everything ascend purely to the overwhelming supra substantial ray of light [radiance] of the Divine Obscurity, desisting and detached from everything!

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Idem, p. lx

⁶² Idem, p. lxi

⁶³ Ibid.

Whether the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* was influenced in a particular theme by the tradition of Dionysius or by that of the Western Church, is difficult to determine, ‘since many of the Dionysian conceptions were based ultimately upon the Scriptures, and many of the same ideas were developed independently by such Fathers as St. Augustine and St. Gregory’.⁶⁴

The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* wants to guide and initiate the reader into contemplation. He guides his reader step by step, teaching and counselling first to become aware of human’s divine existence and then to give up the awareness of one’s existence to go into contemplation.

1.3 The Counselling in *The Book of Privy Counseling*

In the times and tradition of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the counselling practice was characterised as a spiritual guidance in which a guide led his novice to a spiritual transformation. The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* leads his novice onto the path of contemplation. In counselling the emphasis lay on praxis and contemplation.⁶⁵ In contemplative counselling emphasis was put on purification, moral purification. Furthermore, the contemplative way of counselling was a way of being concerned with creation, not only considered in its inner logic, but especially in its logic from God’s perspective. The counselling in *The Book of Privy Counseling* even surpasses ways of existential counselling.

Johnston states that the counselling in *The book of Privy Counseling* is authoritative: ‘the guidance of a man who has trodden the mystical path himself and offers a helping hand to those who will hearken to his words’.⁶⁶

Nowadays counselling is more concerned with behavioural attitudes, with coping strategies and how to deal with professional and personal matters; it can be a solution focused work, directed toward change in behaviour, attitude or a change in life-concepts.

One of the modern definitions of counselling states that ‘counselling is a learning-oriented process, carried on in a one-to-one social environment, in which a counsellor, professionally competent in relevant psychological skills and knowledge, seeks to assist the client, by methods appropriate to the latter’s needs and within the context of the total personnel program, to

⁶⁴ Idem, p. lxix

⁶⁵ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality; Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 342

⁶⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 8

learn more about himself and to accept himself, to learn how to put such understanding into effect in relation to more clearly perceived, realistically defined goals to the end that the client may become a happier and more productive member of his society.⁶⁷

According to Carl Rogers: all helping contact is meant to improve one's own functioning or accelerate one's personal growth.⁶⁸

The Book of Privy Counseling is a practical guidance. It leads the reader onto the path of contemplation. It teaches the reader the contemplative prayer which goes beyond thought and imagery into the 'supra conceptual cloud of unknowing'.⁶⁹ 'In his rejection of conceptualisation the author is radical: all thoughts, all concepts, all images must be buried beneath a metaphorical "cloud of forgetting", while our "naked love" (naked because divested of thought) must rise up to God, hidden in the "cloud of unknowing". In a metaphorical sense: with the cloud of unknowing above, between man and God, and the cloud of forgetting below, between man and all creatures, man finds himself in the "silentium mysticum".⁷⁰

In his rejection of conceptualisations the author already sets the tone in the first paragraph: "Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil".⁷¹ 'God can be loved but he cannot be thought. He can be grasped by love but never by concepts. So: less thinking and more loving'.⁷² So that the mind is free and naked, capable of love, blindly stretching out to God.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author speaks of two clear-cut steps on the way to enlightenment:

'The first step is the rejection of all thoughts about *what I am* and *what God is* in order to be conscious only *that I am* and *that God is*. This is what Johnston calls "existential prayer" because of its abandonment of all essences or modes of being.'

The second step is the rejection of all thought and feeling of one's own being to be conscious only of the being of God. In this way the author leads to a total self-forgetfulness, a seemingly total loss of self for a consciousness only of the being of him whom we love'.⁷³

⁶⁷ Gustad, J. W. and Berdie, R. F. (Ed), *Roles and relationships in counseling*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1953, pp. 3-19

⁶⁸ Rogers, C.R. 'The Characteristics of a helping relationship' *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 37, pp. 6-16

⁶⁹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 8

⁷⁰ Idem, p. 9

⁷¹ Idem, p. 149

⁷² Idem, p. 9

⁷³ Idem, p. 10

1.4 Contemplation in *The Book of Privy Counseling*

In Christian mysticism human existence should be understood in the light of the resurrection. ‘Until the resurrection, man’s personality, his true self, is incomplete. This holds even for Christ, of whom Paul said that “he was constituted Son of God by a glorious act in that he rose from the dead”.⁷⁴ In other words it was through the resurrection that Christ was perfected, finding his true self and ultimate identity. Until this final stage, man is inevitably separated from his end’.⁷⁵

The imperfect state of incompleteness and separation is the basic source of one’s existential anguish that arises not because of her existence but because of one’s *separated existence*.⁷⁶ According to Johnston the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* shows that ‘the sorrow for this separation is much more fundamental and much more conducive to humility than sorrow for one’s sins or anything else’.⁷⁷ The experience of incompleteness at the deepest level of all is that of experiencing the incompleteness of existence. ‘Other sorrows are partial experiences of one root experience of existential contingency’.⁷⁸ According to Johnston ‘this is the sorrow of the man who knows not only *what he is* but *that he is*. All this is not far from the anguish of the existentialist philosophers. ‘Their agony was not necessarily theistic. Rather did it come from a radical sense of man’s insufficiency, contingency, incompleteness, mortality, summed up in Heidegger’s definition of man as “being-to-death”. It is not precisely existence that causes the trouble, but limited existence’.⁷⁹

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the notion of *separation* is stressed. The author emphasises that suffering of man is not *that he is* but *that he is as he is*. The author makes his existential prayer: “That which I am and the way that I am..... I offer it all to you”.⁸⁰

Therefore, in order to contemplate God’s Being, it is fundamental to experience one’s being first before it is possible to give up the blind awareness of being. As soon as we are able to consider man on his way onto contemplation, it is possible to see human existence in the light of Resurrection.

Seeing this, the author makes it clear that the problem is not existence itself but limited existence.

⁷⁴ Romans 1:4

⁷⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973 p. 10

⁷⁶ Idem, p. 12

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Idem, p. 156

Throughout the book the author states that: “He is your being and in him you are what you are”, adding: “He is your being, but you are not his”,⁸¹ reminding the reader that while God is our being we are not God. But having made this distinction he keeps stressing that the great suffering and illusion of man is his failure to experience that God is his being. Rather does he experience his being apart from God.

The whole aim of the author’s direction is to lead the novice to the experience that God “is your being and in him you are what you are”. It is not in isolation, not in separation from the totality that man finds his true self; but only in God. The knowledge and feeling of any self, other than this must be destroyed.⁸²

This logic ‘leads to the inexorable law that the incomplete self must die in order that the true self may arise’. The thought and feeling of self must be annihilated.⁸³

‘Within the Thomasine thought to which the author is faithful, ‘love is “ecstatic” in that it takes one out of the self to live in the thing one loves.’⁸⁴ The author writes that there is a total union (“He is your being”) and yet it is not total since “I am not God’s being” or (“you are not his”). Johnston calls the author ‘a strict Thomist’ of the fourteenth century, who would probably have explained this according to the Platonic notion of ideas in the mind of God – that creation exists from eternity in his mind, so that there is a total unity. To experience this would be “chaste and perfect love” in which one is united with God “blindly”: that is to say, without thoughts or feelings or images of any kind, experiencing oneself in God and through God’.⁸⁵

The experience of the loss of the self, which is an integral part of the author’s direction, will only be understood by those who experience it: “*who experiences it will really understand*”.⁸⁶ If, according to Johnston, there would be a problem with the “learned divines”, it only exists at the verbal or metaphysical level, while at the level of experiential love it is not a problem since then one knows existentially what it is to lose self and find self at the same time.⁸⁷

The author leads the novice to a state of consciousness where she will see it for herself: “And so I urge you: go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you. Knowledge tends

⁸¹ Idem, p. 150

⁸² Idem, p. 13

⁸³ Idem, p. 172

⁸⁴ Idem p. 14

⁸⁵ Idem, p. 14 and 15

⁸⁶ Idem, p. 15 and 16

⁸⁷ Ibid.

to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labour, but love, full of rest".⁸⁸

The research has not traced the bible version used by the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. In those times, next to the Vulgate, people often used the Wycliff translation:

'More than two centuries before the King James Version came into existence, Oxford professor and theologian John Wycliffe undertook the first-ever English translation of the Scripture. The "Early Version" of the Wycliffe Bible, which first appeared in 1382, offered a literal translation of the Latin Vulgate. It was the first time the common people had access to the Scripture in their own language. By 1395, Wycliffe's friend John Purvey had amended the often-unwieldy translation into a "Later Version", which was easier to read but kept much of the poetry of the Early Version. This version, known today as the Wycliffe Bible, was widely distributed throughout England'.⁸⁹

However, there is no evidence that the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* used the Wycliff Bible. It is understood that he used the Vulgate, which he translated for his own use.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author continually refers to the Bible in a contemplative, mystical way, for example, to: the Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Matthew, John, Corinthians, Galatians, etc. In this sense, he resembled the other mystics who 'lived the Scripture from within'.⁹⁰ Paul says: "No one can understand the spirit of a man except his own spirit".⁹¹ According to Johnston no one can really understand the Scriptures except he who possesses the Spirit that composed them. The contemplative approach to the Scriptures complements the exegetical".⁹² This is vital, since no one can really understand the Scriptures except those who have the divine Spirit that made them and assembled them.

Since contemplation is the focus of attention within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, it is important to describe what the author probably meant by this notion. Before enlightening the notion 'Contemplation' it is necessary to describe the terms 'spirituality' and 'mysticism'.

⁸⁸ Idem, p. 188

⁸⁹ Wycliffe bible, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/wyc/>,
http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/biblical_studies/wycliffe/

⁹⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 20

⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 2,10-11

⁹² Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 20

Spirituality

In this research spirituality is considered as a relational process ‘which constitutes an original whole’ in which God and man are mutually related.⁹³

‘The relational process can be viewed from the standpoint of the divine pole: God communicates himself in a dark light; on the way to this divine self-communication man appropriates for himself God’s truth and worth in order to become perfect in God. It can also be viewed from the standpoint of the human pole: humans in various ways prepare themselves for union with God in order to grow in the direction of perfection in God’.⁹⁴

Spirituality concerns the interpersonal relationship between man and God. It implies a dedication in contact with the Source which touches and moves the soul, a deep stirring by contact with the Source.

Moreover, spirituality can be considered as a historical form, presented in forms of language and expression, sustained by spiritual communities and religious traditions. This historical form has an “inside” which can be made accessible by interpretation and interiorized by actors. The form delineates itself against the background of a context: religious, social, and cultural context, where the measure of distance or closeness can vary: adaptation, resistance from below, liminality, marginality.

Spirituality and context have a dialectic relationship with a tension between continuity and discontinuity: on the one hand spirituality expresses itself in the language of a certain period, through which its search for God gets a form and content. On the other hand the same spirituality withdraws itself from the cultural language in which it expresses itself. It does not find words, it is inexpressible: the experienced or lived spirituality cannot express itself in the language of the time. The cultural language falls short. That is the reason why spirituality speaks of the “unspeakable” or “inexpressible”.⁹⁵

In short: spirituality can be defined as divine-human transformation. Kees Waaijman stresses the syllable *form* stating: “trans-*form*-ation”. ‘The divine and the human reality are involved in a process of reciprocal change; they stand out in relation to each other, precisely through the mediating form. This process of change involves moments of discontinuity’.⁹⁶

⁹³ Waaijman, Kees: *Spirituality; Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 423

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Idem, p. 406-407

⁹⁶ Idem, p. 424

Mysticism

Mysticism is not only intellectual and academic, but also practical. Many people feel attracted towards reading the mystics in order to ‘practise the doctrine they teach and to experience the states of consciousness they depict. The interest in Christian mysticism is part of a widespread craving for meditation, for contemplation, for depth – a desire to get beyond the changing phenomena into a deeper reality that lies at the centre of things. Mysticism is no longer irrelevant; it is in the air we breathe’.⁹⁷

Mysticism as a dynamic process implies the transformation process in the relationship between man and God. A mystical experience is not actively evoked, but it happens to someone. It is a breakthrough of a complete new awareness, a new awareness of another reality. Rationality is involved. This awareness is called “enlightenment”. It is affective and the resemblance with emotional experience is that the mystical insight withdraws itself from the logical intellect. In a mystical experience a deeper layer of reality penetrates man’s consciousness. It is a reality which has always been present, though not in one’s consciousness.

However, Mysticism has a polemic layer, in so far it is opposite to the rational theology. ‘Spirituality carries its own logic: the logic of mysticism’.⁹⁸

Originally the word ‘mysticism’ is related to the Greek verbs *muo* (closing of the eyes and mouth) and *mueo* (initiating into the mysteries). The adjective *mustikos* (Latin: *mysticus*) means accordingly: related to the mysteries in which one is initiated (*mustès*, *mustagogos*, *mustagogia*), of which one is quiet and keeps silent (*muo*). This adjective *mustikos*, which does not occur in the New Testament (except in Fil. 4:12) or in the Apostolic Fathers, started functioning within the Christian spirituality from the third century. In Origen *mustikos* is related to the hidden meaning of the Scripture and closely related to the secret of the Scripture. One speaks about the mystical bread, the mystical Wine and the mystical Cup. What counts for the Scripture and liturgy, counts for the whole of the sacraments. Gregorius of Nyssa speaks about ‘the one reality of mystical rites and symbols’.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 7

⁹⁸ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality; Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 353

⁹⁹ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality; Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 355, Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* lib. 11 (PG 45, 880B0).

In his mystical theology Dionysius the Areopagite, in the line of Gregory of Nyssa, Plato's cave allegory and the ascent of the Mount Sinai melt together. From now on "mysticism" 'is the ascent from man to God, who dwells in the dark light (beyond all affirmations and negations) which is invisible for the eyes of our knowledge, the cloud of un-knowing'.¹⁰⁰

From the medieval times mystical ascent has become more and more related to purification of desire. This pure desire penetrates deeper into the cloud of un-knowing than the mind, even so much that love is understood as the apophatic of the intellect: 'love knows what exceeds the intellect. Mysticism leans over to the side of (purified) feeling and will'.¹⁰¹

At the same time in the Middle Ages mysticism is identified as the way inward. To Dionysius the Areopagite the mystical ascent meant a gradual ascent beyond the hierarchy of being, after the Middle Ages the mystical ascent was focused on God who is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. 'This inward way is a process of recollection: guided by God himself the soul comes to its root/origin/source, in which it, unclothed of any self-direction, enters into the oneness of God. The hierarchy of being of Dionysius has imploded and forms the inner trace of the way to God'.¹⁰²

Contemplation

For centuries the word 'contemplation' indicated the field of spirituality. Contemplation originates from *con* (together) and *templum* (observation room, place). In combining these two words 'con' and 'templum' contemplation can be defined as: to linger in an observation space to attentively perceive and observe the movements of the Divine.¹⁰³ The Greek equivalent is *theoria*, meaning: attentively follow that which occurs to us as a divine display. To the ancient philosophy contemplation meant: searching for the ultimate Truth, being fascinated by the Good, becoming united with the One. Contemplation was the ultimate aim of human existence. This contemplation flourished in an ascetic way of life: loosening the self from daily worries, heading for virtual life and purifying the self from mitigating patterns.¹⁰⁴

'Early Christianity integrated the philosophical contemplation within a Christian frame of reference but it also featured accents of its own. It

¹⁰⁰ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality; Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 355

¹⁰¹ Idem, p. 356

¹⁰² Idem, pp. 50-185, 354

¹⁰³ Idem, p. 343

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

emphasised the unity of praxis and contemplation'.¹⁰⁵ Contemplation implies a lifelong practice and ends in it. The second emphasis, purification, means moral purification. Furthermore: contemplation is a way of being concerned with creation, not only considered in its inner logic, but precisely in its logic from God's perspective.

The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* emphasised the need for grace, immanence and transcendence, the relationship of body and soul in the work of contemplation, the respective merits of the active and contemplative lives. In other words: even though commitment is of vital importance, contemplation itself is Grace.

The contemplative growth from 'being' into 'Being' is at stake. The assumption that man has an innate knowledge of Being, or rather: man innately realises God's Being. This is the case in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, in which it is already stated right from the beginning that the one who is addressed is the "Dear Friend in God", being of the same disposition.

Love is at the centre of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, or rather: love is the very heart of this work which the author refers to as a "naked intent of the will", "a blind outstretching", "a gentle stirring of love", "this work" or just as "it". 'It should be noted, however, that the author uses these expressions for an activity that includes knowledge or consciousness of some kind'.¹⁰⁶

For purposes of analysis it is possible to speak of knowledge and love in contemplation; but the activity the author speaks of is a blend of both, 'a completely simple experience arising in the depth of the contemplative heart: in the last analysis it is indescribable, as the author declares when he says that "Whatever we may say of it is not it, but only about it"'.¹⁰⁷

The author has no doubt that its predominant element is love and it is upon this that he puts all the emphasis. Love comes to dominate in the mystical life: 'Your whole personality will be transformed; your countenance will radiate an inner beauty, and for as long as you feel it nothing will sadden you. A thousand miles would you run to speak with another whom you knew really felt it, and yet when you got there, find yourself speechless'.¹⁰⁸

According to Johnston 'it is precisely this love that gives wisdom, the truest knowledge. The meditational process taught by the author could be described in three stages: First, there is the clear and distinct knowledge

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, p. 21

¹⁰⁷ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 169

¹⁰⁸ Idem, p. 182-183

brought by discursive meditation. This is abandoned for the guidance of love. Then this love finds wisdom'.¹⁰⁹

'This kind of wisdom is apparent in human relations where love can discover beauty and potentiality that reason alone cannot find'.¹¹⁰ The author stands in the stream of tradition that regards mysticism as 'a love affair between the bridegroom and the bride, between Yahweh and his people'.¹¹¹

Throughout the whole Book of Privy Counseling the author refers to Christ, e.g. when he describes the household of the Spirit of which He is both the porter and the door. As God He is the porter, as man he is the door.

In another reference the author relates to Christ "who has to go" to indicate a transformation from the flesh to the spirit in this counselling process. Christ told his disciples that: "It is expedient for you that I go".¹¹² His disciples had become so attached to his historical body that they could not live with his glorified body.

¹⁰⁹ Idem, p. 23

¹¹⁰ Idem, p. 24

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Idem, p. 187

2. The Research

The Book of Privy Counseling is a fundamental counsel which guides its reader(s) into contemplation. This book, or letter, with its mystical dynamics, touches, moves its reader to go the way which opens itself throughout the reading process into union with God's being, in a growing awareness of being seen and loved by God. In and through this *Book of Privy Counseling* a divine-human transformation takes place.

2.1 The relevance of research in *The Book of Privy Counseling*

Literature research has shown that no concrete steps have been taken to analyse articulated mystical dynamic processes within *The Book of Privy Counseling* or the narrative dynamical communicative relation through which the text moves the reader onto contemplation. Therefore the mystical dynamics of the text and its reader deserve more research since it will contribute to a more profound understanding of which mystical dynamics arise between the author and the reader.

2.2 The status quaestionis

In 'The Cloud of Unknowing: an introduction', by John P.H. Clark,¹¹³ a literary and theological analysis of *The book of Privy Counseling* has been carried out, showing the literary and theological relationship of the book to Walter Hilton and others and the sequence of literary works produced by the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. However, an analysis on mystical dynamics within *The Book of Privy Counseling* is lacking.

In 'An approach to *The Cloud of Unknowing*' in *Analecta Cartusiana* by Rosemary Ann Lees and others¹¹⁴ the reader is confronted with a mystical theological approach to the Cloud of Unknowing, but unfortunately no mystical dynamic approach can be found.

Robert Llewellyn states that the reader learns that the theme of both books, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling* is 'the way of

¹¹³ Clark, J.P.H. 'The Cloud of Unknowing: an introduction', in: *Analecta Cartusiana* 3, ed. Hogg, J., Salzburg, Austria, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1995

¹¹⁴ Lees, R.A. 'The Negative language of the Dionysian school of Mystical Theology, an approach to the Cloud of Unknowing', in: *Analecta Cartusiana* 1-2, ed. Hogg, J., Salzburg, Austria, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1983

prayer in the obscurity of faith, without the support of reasoning, memory, imagination or the outward senses'.¹¹⁵ He quotes a phrase in *The Book of Privy Counseling* to illustrate his statement:

*'See that nothing occupies your thoughts except an utter determination – a naked intent – to reach out to God: no special thought about what he is, or how he works, but only that he is as he is. Let him be himself, please, and nothing else. You are not to go probing him with your smart and subtle ideas.... It is as if you were saying to God, 'What I am, Lord, I offer you. I am not thinking of you in any particular way, except that you are as you are, no more and no less'.*¹¹⁶

According to Robert Llewellyn the books were written for a young disciple who appealed to the author for teaching on prayer. He also stated that the author intended to direct his counsel on to every reader who felt attracted in the same way.

Unfortunately, he does not supply a complete mystical dynamic reading of *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

In 'The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing', by William Johnston, E. Underhill a.o. the reader can find a general theoretical approach on *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Mysticism is described in terms of Divine Love as 'The blind stirring', 'knowledge and love', 'high ghostly wisdom', the 'necessity of purification', 'the path of purification' and finally the 'union', which is 'the summit'. Johnston also studies 'God and creature', 'The Divinization of man' and 'the spiritual marriage'.¹¹⁷

Johnston elaborates on the different mental activities in the work of the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. He distinguishes two kinds of thinking or mental activities, 'one of which is called vertical, existential, supra conceptual, as opposed to the other, called: horizontal, essential, or conceptual'.¹¹⁸ The horizontal way of thinking moves in successive images and it concentrates on *what* a person or thing is, rather than *that* someone or something is and in it the mind is conscious of time and place. 'To this way of thinking belongs logic, reasoning discourse: it is the conceptual process at work in the daily life of everyone. The author uses this way of thinking

¹¹⁵ Llewellyn, R. *With Pity not with Blame, Reflections on the Writings of Julian of Norwich and on The Cloud of Unknowing*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982

¹¹⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 150-151

¹¹⁷ Johnston, W. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2000

¹¹⁸ Idem, p. 258 and 259

in his logical exposition of mysticism. The vertical way of thinking does not move in successive images but it spirals down silently into the depth of one's being without concepts, without images, and (at its highest point) without consciousness of time. This tells *that* reality is rather than *what* it is.¹¹⁹ According to Johnston the English writer is 'leading to it when he bids the contemplative not to meditate on the qualities of God, reflecting on *what* he is but simply to hold himself in the existential realisation of the fact *that* God is and *that I am*'.¹²⁰

In short: William Johnston has thoroughly studied the mysticism of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. He emphasises different ways of thinking, however, no mystical dynamic analysis of *The Book of Privy Counseling* has been explicitly carried out by W. Johnston.

John D. Green supplies a mystical articulation of the works of the author, arguing that: 'he wishes to address only those who "in thy supposing" – an important qualification – are committed to trying to be 'perfect' followers of Christ'. Moreover, John D. Green argues that they are not, however, beginners. They have already demonstrated their good intentions in 'active Christian living' but have come to realise there is a further step along the path to perfection. Furthermore, they wish to proceed to this 'sovereignest point' of becoming a contemplative. To guide his audience to this furthest point along the path is the author's objective'.¹²¹ He states that we must return to the Martha-Mary story, to which "the best part of Mary" refers. 'The writer may perhaps use Mary Magdalene's experience as symbolic of the Christian's progress from sinner to contemplative in *The Book of Privy Counseling*'.¹²²

*all the men of this life may be divided in three; in sinners, in actives, and in contemplatives.*¹²³

The gradations reflect various degrees of divine involvement, referring to religious sources and indicating mystical layers, although no mystical dynamics is articulated.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Idem, p. 259

¹²¹ Green, John D. 'A strange Tongue', *Tradition, Language and the Appropriation of Mystical Experience in late fourteenth-century England and sixteenth-century Spain*, Leuven, Peeters, 2002, pp. 84-104

¹²² Idem, p. 104

¹²³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 180

John Green relates to the New Testament and to the author's explanation for the ascending scale in the above quoted typology:

*And thus when our Lord says: "Without me you can do nothing", he speaks to everyone, since everyone on earth falls into one of these three groups. In sinners he is actively present, permitting them to do as they will; in actives, he is present, permitting and assisting; and in contemplatives, as sole master, awakening and leading them in this divine work.*¹²⁴

The contemplative is being led by God to his 'sovereignest point', this 'best part', for which Mary is the archetype where Christian perfection is to be found. Those who resign in the 'active', Christian life may be completely unaware of the powerful stirrings which 'aileth' contemplatives. The author's work is about how God's lead may be recognised and followed through the metamorphosis which transforms the 'active' into the 'contemplative'.¹²⁵

According to Green, the achievement of Christian perfection is in the author's view a literal metamorphosis, in which 'the Christian sheds his or her skin of sensuality, like a suit of clothes, to be clothed by God in a new skin and emerge as a transformed being by the experience of 'oneing' in which the metamorphosis takes place'.¹²⁶

He also states that the author's story is about the intensely painful process of metamorphosis, which he tells in vivid physical and psychological metaphors. He suggests that the stages of sinful and active life are not so much to be forgotten as seen in a different light by those who achieve their goal of 'oneing' or 'union' with the divinity: "So his 'play' unfolds in a number of scenes. The first scene may be called 'steryng of love'.¹²⁷ It is the metaphor of the 'blind stirring of love'. In it 'being' is stirred to emerge from the darkness of the mire in which it has sunk, in response to some 'blind' unrecognised goad. It emerges from the mire in the second scene which may be called the 'stynche' of 'synne',¹²⁸ in which it recognises its foulness in contrast to some primeval memory of the smell of pure air. It is then led to strip off the foul accretions of mire which had stained its clothing. This third scene may be called 'the nakedness'. In it the powerful and painful process of forgetting and shedding the mire and the stench of

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Green, John D. *'A strange Tongue', Tradition, Language and the Appropriation of Mystical Experience in late fourteenth-century England and sixteenth-century Spain*, 2002, pp. 84-104

¹²⁶ Idem., p. 87

¹²⁷ Idem., p. 88

¹²⁸ Ibid.

sin takes place. As this process of forgetfulness of the past develops, the pure, clear light of the future shines through in its intense blinding. In the fourth scene, therefore, the being suffers ‘the blindness’ of ‘unknowing’. The being ‘feels’ and gropes the way forward guided by the warmth from the source of light. In the final scene it experiences ‘the oneing’ in which the metamorphosis is completed. Sight returns and with it the view of all things is transformed.¹²⁹

John Green¹³⁰ argues that his reconstruction follows the process through which discernment of spirits develops by successive stages from recognition to faith and love resulting in a total metamorphosis. ‘It is not so much a process of ascent to enlightenment but a progressive denuding from within as the contemplation descends into the depths of the human psyche in nakedness and blindness. The dramatic denouement, which is the reward of faith and perseverance, is restoration of sight, totally transformed. The author seems to believe it is a ‘full’ enlightenment, which is possible only when the roots of sin are destroyed and which cannot be achieved in any other way. The restoration of sight in the return to health and wholeness is totally gratuitous but never withheld from those who trust completely in the divine mercy. This, the author believes, is the way of the cross. The ‘resurrection’ process through which the contemplative passes in the ‘oneing’, is an experience of such sublimity that the author will not defile it by attempting to describe it with his ‘blabryng fleshly’ tongue’.¹³¹

John Green¹³² quotes William Johnston’s *The mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* saying that the author refers to the ‘blind stirring’ variously as this ‘secret little love’, ‘the naked intent of the will’, ‘the blind outstretching’, ‘the meek stirring of love’, ‘this working’ and sometimes simply as ‘it’. ‘Naked’ in such a context implies ‘single-minded’, without any other intent; to be sought after for its own sake in a ‘blind outstretching’ which becomes a ‘working’ when it is harnessed to power and is called ‘a heave’. It is something that wants to be harnessed but the object to which the harness is attached is ‘felt’ but remains ‘unknown’ and the harnessed being ‘blind’.

The author uncovers the object and source of this ‘love’: almighty God with his Grace must always be the chief stirrer and worker, either with means or without.¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Idem, p. 89

¹³³ Ibid.

Contemplation is the summit. The contemplative should aim to seek a life at the summit by cultivating this ‘little love’, this stirring, so that it becomes the dominant guide in the ‘contemplative’s life’.¹³⁴

There are roughly two kinds of stirrings, one which arises from within and one from without. The ordinary Grace, the natural delight which arises from reflections and evidences of God in his/her daily routines, or the special Grace which urges the recipient on to the life of perfection. According to John Green there is no indubitable evidence of a special Grace, but when both are experienced together it is very ‘probable that the stirring is evidence of a special calling’.¹³⁵ Persons in this position only want to be with contemplatives and talk about the experience of this stirring. They would run a thousand miles to talk about it with someone who was known to have really experienced it.¹³⁶ In its intensity the stirring seems to dominate the personality.¹³⁷

John Green comes close to the mystical dynamics. However, this research goes further: it reveals how the mystical process in the text sets the mystical dynamic process in the reader into motion. The reader becomes more and more conscious of this process, which guides her consciously unknowing towards contemplation. This research investigates narratively which element of the counsel sets the reader into motion in his or her confrontation with Jesus Christ. To discover this element the counsel forces the reader to speak directly to God. Gradually, the reader becomes a partner in the counselling process and this characteristic is essential of a direct counsel.

Bernard McGinn states that the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* differs from earlier authors in his ‘failure to stress the subsuming power of love to draw up all human knowing into the higher awareness of God’.¹³⁸ This seems remarkable, since Bernard McGinn first states that: ‘On the relation of love and knowledge in the path to God, the dominant note of the *Cloud* author is well expressed in this statement’: ¹³⁹ ‘*it is love alone that can reach to God in this life, and not knowing*’ (*Cloud*, chap. 8). He also states

¹³⁴ Idem, p. 91

¹³⁵ Idem, p. 92

¹³⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 182-183

¹³⁷ Green, John D. ‘*A strange Tongue*’, *Tradition, Language and the Appropriation of Mystical Experience in late fourteenth-century England and sixteenth-century Spain*, 2002, p. 92 and Johnston W. *The mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, 1980, p. 98

¹³⁸ McGinn, B. ‘The English Mystics’, in: *Christian Spirituality, High Middle Ages and Reformation*, 1987, p. 202

¹³⁹ Ibid.

that the author did not lack all appreciation of the role of rational knowledge; there are passages in *The Book of Privy Counseling* that show that ‘he agreed with a long tradition in Christian mysticism that recognized a form of transcendent knowledge in the experience of loving union, however much he weights the balance on the side of love’.¹⁴⁰ Then McGinn argues that the author’s teaching on union with God ‘is eminently orthodox, carefully avoiding any suggestion of union of identity or indistinction and adhering to traditional formulas based on the notion of *unitas spiritus* found in 1 Corinthians 6:17’.¹⁴¹ McGinn’s argument for this is that for the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* ‘the mystical union was achieved by Moses who entered the dark cloud to feel in experience the presence of Him that is above all things. This experience, however, seems open only to those who lead the contemplative life under a religious rule’.¹⁴² Moreover, he states that *The Book of Privy Counseling* analyses the “naked intent” that leads to God and the nature of the union possible in this life. God is the being of the soul: ‘evermore saving this difference between you and Him, that He is your being and you are not His’.¹⁴³ In this remark he articulates the mysticism and mystical characteristics of *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

Phyllis Hodgson argues that *The Book of Privy Counseling* presents the theme of Divine enlightenment in Union through an anagogical exegesis of Proverbs:¹⁴⁴ ‘*his goostly wisdom, sodenly & frely riftid of be spirit inly in itself & vnformid....impossible to be strenid or to falle vnder be worching of naturele witte*’.¹⁴⁵ ‘The range of purgation indicated in *The Cloud* treatises extend from the first turning upwards God through Grace and faith to the last state of an experienced union, when the indwelling Spirit wholly takes over. The arid feeling of dereliction just before final attainment, well testified in mystical writings of all times and vividly described in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, is actually the ultimate Purgation of all self-hood’.¹⁴⁶ To be capable thereby of such infused contemplation is ‘to have regained the soul’s pristine ‘likeness’ to its Creator by the eradication of all the ‘unlikeness’ of self-centredness. The Christian ascesis is a long, austere, and progressive discipline involving body and soul, and culminating only

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Idem, p. 201

¹⁴⁴ Proverbs 3:13-14, 21-26

¹⁴⁵ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p xxxiii

¹⁴⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 182-186

in the final state of beatitude. God is Pure Spirit, and only in purity of the spirit can the contemplative finally attain to Divine Union'.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, Phyllis Hodgson states that *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling* were specifically written to exhort, encourage, and guide those already called to the contemplative life. In spite of this, they make only passing references to the earlier phases of the ascent. The final purgation is to liberate the spirit from the busy operations of the intellect, so that with undistracted attention, it is free to offer itself wholly to God in the prayer of 'love without knowing'.¹⁴⁸

Phyllis Hodgson does indeed come to a mystical dynamic approach of 'The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises' in a general sense, referring to the time spirit, in relation to the medieval theology and the medieval concept of the nature of man and stressing the traditional stages of the Mystic way resembling the stages, or phases in *Privy Counseling*: Purgation, Illumination and Union. However, a more elaborate mystical dynamic approach is still lacking.

Phyllis Hodgson does supply a systematic interpretation of the mysticism in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, but Phyllis Hodgson does not articulate the mystical narrative dynamic process and Phyllis Hodgson does not come to the mystical implications.

So far no explicit steps towards a mystical dynamic reading of *The Book of Privy Counseling* can be detected and from literature research it can be concluded that no real steps have been taken to analyse either any articulated mystical or communicative dynamic processes. So, a thorough investigation of both the internal communicative relation between the persons involved and the external relation between the text and its reader could contribute to a profound understanding of which mystical dynamics arise between all parties involved.

The authors involved do articulate the mystical phases and gradations, but they do not supply a close hermeneutic reading. This research shows what the novice-reader experiences in the reading process. Phyllis Hodgson tries to get grip in the phases which she labels systematically on the text. This research does not search for concepts but supplies a hermeneutic close reading to reveal the dynamics.

¹⁴⁷ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, Salzburg, Austria, 1982, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

In the above quoted secondary literature profound studies have been made into the mystical layers of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, however, a hermeneutic mystical dynamic reading and a narrative dynamic analysis are lacking. The above mentioned works elaborately describe the mysticism in the works of the unknown author and his mystical tradition and now it is worthwhile to attempt to reveal the mystical and narrative dynamics that initiate the reader into the mystical realms of the counsel.

2.3 Research question

As already stated in 2.1 literature research has shown that no concrete steps have been taken to analyse articulated mystical dynamic processes within the medieval *Book of Privy Counseling* and the narrative dynamical communicative relation through which the text of this work moves the reader. Therefore the communicative relationship between the text and its reader deserves serious attention and research since it will contribute to a more profound understanding of which mystical dynamics arise between the author and the reader. In the reading process of *The Book of Privy Counseling* the parallel communicative relationships between the author and his characters, personified by the monk and the novice, and between the author and the reader, come more and more together in an interpersonal mystical union between God and man.

As a consequence the problem statement of the research is as follows: to reveal the internal structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling* by analysing the mystical communicative relationships. Through the narrative communicative relationship between the monk and the novice the mystical divine dimension reveals itself. The counsel presents the communication between God and the human soul.

In order to get a more profound understanding of which mystical and narrative dynamics arise between the author and the reader, the research aims at revealing the internal structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling* by analysing the mystical communicative relationships between the protagonist, personified by the monk, and the antagonist, personified by the novice, on the one hand and the communicative relation between a concrete author who communicates with God and who lets God talk to the reader on the other hand. The novice speaks through the counsellor. All parties involved reveal the mystical and narrative dynamical structure.

The counsel communicates as an implied author through the monk-narrator to an implied reader through the novice-narratee, directed by the real author

towards the real reader. The research attempts to articulate which dynamics transform the counsel into a Divine Counsel, by revealing the mystical dynamics through the narrative dynamic analysis. In short: in this counselling process, the narrative dynamics transform into mystical narrative dynamics. The research tries to reveal the inexpressible and unspeakable communication by analysing the narrative dynamics.

The research will be done both internally and externally. Internally, within the text, investigating the communication between the narrating I-person, supposedly personified by the monk and the narratee, supposedly personified by the novice; externally, the communication between the author and the reader.

The uniqueness, or the distinctiveness, of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, being literally an explicit way of counselling opens new ways of stating that this way of counselling is a form of spirituality in itself.

In order to reveal the internal structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the mystical communicative relationships between the monk - (implied) author and the novice - (implied) reader will be analysed. To get a clear view on the internal structure the research question will be as follows:

Which mystical dynamic communicative processes can be distinguished within *The Book of Privy Counseling*?

It is a fundamental condition to analyse the narrative dynamics and to reveal the mystagogic layers within *The Book of Privy Counseling* in order to distinguish the mystical dynamics.

Consequently it is important to distinguish the communicative processes to find out how *The Book of Privy Counseling* guides its reader into contemplation.

To realise this, the research takes three steps to distinguish the mystical dynamics: firstly a close reading will be applied, secondly a narrative analysis will be carried out and thirdly the mystagogic implications will be articulated.

2.4 The methodological approach of the research

The Book of Privy Counseling communicates in two levels, layers or dimensions: in a literary surface layer and in a deeper spiritual layer. On the surface the communication between the monk-narrator and the novice-narratee, or the protagonist and the antagonist, takes place. It should be

noted that the novice, as the antagonist, is known through the monk's tale. In the underlying layer the communication between the implied author and implied reader takes place. Through the deeper layers the counsel spirals down into the depths of the soul of both the (implied) author and the (implied) reader.

As far as these layers of communication are concerned, the counsel represents two ways of thinking or two mental activities which show themselves on a vertical and a horizontal level: 'the vertical, existential, supra conceptual level, as opposed to the horizontal, essential or conceptual level'.¹⁴⁹ The horizontal level or dimension of thinking moves in successive images and it concentrates on *what* a person or thing is, rather than *that* someone or something is and in it the mind is conscious of time and place. 'To this way of thinking belongs logic, reasoning discourse: it is the conceptual process at work in the daily life of everyone. The author uses this way of thinking in his logical exposition of mysticism. The vertical way of thinking does not move in successive images but it spirals down silently into the depth of one's being without concepts, without images, and (at its highest point) without consciousness (of time). This tells *that* reality is rather than *what* it is.'¹⁵⁰ According to Johnston the English author is 'leading to 'it' when he bids the contemplative not to meditate on the qualities of God, reflecting on *what He* is but simply to hold himself in the existential realisation of the fact '*that God is and that I am*'.¹⁵¹

In this research the two layers or dimensions of communication will be investigated, taking into consideration that the counsel fundamentally communicates in the spiritual deeper layer. However, it needs the superficial explicit communicative layer to reveal the deeper dimension. In the surface layer the counsel is explicitly mentioned and described but it is the deep spiritual dimension which really speaks to the reader. This is the focus of attention within this research.

The mystical dynamic and the narrative dynamic reading show how the counsel gradually transforms into a Divine Counsel in which God himself relates to the monk-narrator, the first (I) person, and to the implied reader and therefore to the real reader as well. In other words: firstly, the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader becomes explicit and in due course this relationship gradually transforms into a divine relationship showing how God wants to be involved.

¹⁴⁹ Johnston, W. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, 2000, pp. 258-259

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

To show how this process unfolds the research takes the following steps:

Firstly, the research focuses on a hermeneutic mystical dynamic reading, describing the mystical communicative relationship between the monk and the novice. Through that relationship the research attempts to describe the relationship between the (implied) author and the (implied) reader. As soon as the research demonstrates how those relationships are interrelated within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the author's intentions can be analysed and investigated. The research starts with a close reading in which *The Book of Privy Counseling* is interpreted. In the surface layer the monk communicates with the novice, in order to create the possibility for to become conscious of God speaking to the author and the reader. This reading will be carried out in part 3: the mystical dynamics.

Secondly, the research attempts to get a grasp on the narrative structure by applying a hermeneutic narrative approach. After uncovering the relationships within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, it is possible to investigate the narrative dynamic linguistic nature of the communication within this book. This will be carried out through a narrative analysis, based on criteria for narrative dynamic reading according to Tolmie's and Chatman's theories.¹⁵² Following Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's anthropological theories¹⁵³, three phases of separation, transition and incorporation are indicated. This part of the research will be carried out in part 4.

Thirdly, through the mystical and narrative dynamical readings the inner logic of *The Book of Privy Counsel* will be revealed to the reader. Through the reading process the reader becomes more and more aware of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. This process consists of subsequent steps in a circular movement. *The Book of Privy Counseling* takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of *The Book of Privy Counseling* and from the perspective of the reader. Therefore this

¹⁵² Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, San Francisco – London – Bethesda, International Scholars Publications, 1999 and Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1978

¹⁵³ Turner, V. *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York, Aldine Publishing Company, 1969 and Gennep, van A. *The rites of passage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960

chapter will deal with the three stages seen from both perspectives. To learn how the reader can be involved in this process the research attempts to articulate the mystical implications in part 5.

In short, the research design shows the following phases:

1. a mystical dynamic hermeneutic close reading
2. a narrative dynamical reading
3. a synthesis through the mystagogic implications.

2.5 The reading approaches of the research

2.5.1 The hermeneutic reading approach

In the counsel the monk- narrator provokes a process in the novice-reader and this process is read by the researcher. To go along in the process the research-reader applies a mystical hermeneutic reading approach.

In the mystical dynamic reading, the characteristics of mystical language, the language of the mystics, will be described, articulated and investigated. Mystical language is an attempt to express the unspeakable or inexpressible. Characteristic for mystical language is its paradoxical character. ‘What is asserted is at the same time denied. There are no words available that can express precisely what has been experienced’.¹⁵⁴

Hermeneutics is understood as ‘the most essential level of close reading’.¹⁵⁵ Spiritual hermeneutic reading, ‘tries to penetrate to the core, the deeper meaning of the text’.¹⁵⁶ In other words: hermeneutics is a reading method to get a fundamental understanding of a text.

Kees Waaijman states that the spiritual reading praxis of the experiential spirituality opens, from a phenomenological point of view, the reality in which the spiritual hermeneutics is critically involved. The practice supplies the fundamental categories, such as: text, reading, interpretation, sense, meaning, transcendence, if critically undertaken, form the coordinates of the hermeneutic spirituality research.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Borchert, B. *Mysticism. Its history and challenge*, York Beach, Maine, S. Weiser, 1994, p. 18

¹⁵⁵ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality, Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 412

¹⁵⁶ Idem, p. 704

¹⁵⁷ Idem, p. 691

The Christian reading practices can be divided into two mainstreams, according to Kees Waaijman: the Alexandrian and the Antiochian reading practice on the one hand and the monastic reading practice on the other:

The *Alexandrian way of reading*: Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 45 AD) developed an allegorical (metaphorical) way of reading, to show that the spiritual sense of the Scriptures resembles the philosophical insights of Plato, who considered hermeneutics as an appropriate reading method to get a fundamental understanding of the transcendent being of a text. ‘Plato used this term in a number of dialogues, contrasting hermeneutic knowledge to that of *sophia*. Religious knowledge is a knowledge of what has been revealed or said and does not, like *sophia*, involve knowledge of the truth-value of the utterance. Aristotle carried this use of the term a step further, naming his work on logic and semantics *Peri hermeneias*, which was later rendered as *De interpretatione*. Only with the Stoics, and their reflections on the interpretation of myth, do we encounter something like a methodological awareness of the problems of textual understanding’.¹⁵⁸ Clemens of Alexandria elaborated on Philo’s work: ‘via the allegorical indication or interpretation we are being initiated into the knowledge (gnosis) of Christ. Via Origen, a pupil of Clemens, the Alexandrian exegeses influenced Christian reading thoroughly. In his *On First principles* Origen develops his triple scripture sense: the literal sense, relating to the somatic level of man, *soma*, concerning the historical meaning; the typological sense, relating to the soul, *psyche*, concerning the moral application; the spiritual sense, relating to the spirit, *nous*, concerning the final sense. The literal meaning of the text is always the beginning of his way of reading, which pertains to its full ultimate meaning: the spiritual meaning which transcends, or exceeds the literary-historical and the allegorical-typological’.¹⁵⁹

The *Antiochian way of reading*. In the Antiochian School (Syria), which developed from approximately 380 A.D. on, the literary aspects of the text were sharply paid attention to in ‘Rabbinical houses of study’.¹⁶⁰ This attention to the literal meaning immediately led to sharp attention to the historical dimension of the text.

However, like the rabbis the Antiochians were convinced that the literary historical meaning does not form the end of the reading process. Within the literary-historical sense God works, speaks and expresses himself. They

¹⁵⁸ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> and Chladenius, J.M. *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernunftiger Reden und Schriften*, Düsseldorf, Stern-Berlag Janssen, 1969

¹⁵⁹ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 695

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

wanted to look, see and view (*theoria*) the ultimate sense of the text. Therefore they were interested in prophetic events to understand God's future in them. The 'theoria' as an exegetic method tries to reveal the divine inspiration in the "literary-historical fabric".¹⁶¹

The *monastic* reading practice. Monks dedicated many hours to the *lectio divina*, a meditative and praying relation with the Scripture.¹⁶² They oriented themselves on the quadruple Scripture sense, which connected to the way of Origen's reading. A medieval saying summarizes this way of reading as follows: 1. 'The letter teaches what happened, 2. The allegorical or metaphorical sense teaches what to believe, 3. The moral sense teaches what to do and finally, 4. The anagogical sense teaches to whether we stretch or reach out to go'.¹⁶³ 'The essence of the *lectio divina* has been summarized in an exemplary way by Guigo II the Cartusian in his so called *Scala claustralium*,¹⁶⁴ a letter to his friend Gervasius.

For Guigo and for his tradition, which he summarizes, reading the Scripture lies between *lectio* and *contemplation*. 'The reading comes first, as if it were the fundament'¹⁶⁵ of the whole reading procedure.¹⁶⁶ 'However, precisely as a fundament its intention reaches further: the reading seeks the sweetness of a happy and heavenly life'.¹⁶⁷ To achieve this aim the reading needs the exercise¹⁶⁸ of the 'meditatio' and the 'oratio'. To Guigo reading is a way which one goes step by step.¹⁶⁹ This can be applied to *The Book of Privy Counseling*: reading, step by step, following the spiral structure in which the process goes on by taking steps back and forward, considering and reconsidering to continue.

As far as this research into *The Book of Privy Counseling* is concerned, the monastic reading practice will be applied in an modernized way, which is more up to date in the 21st century. This means that the research positions itself in the traditions of the monastic reading approach using the insights of the hermeneutic mystical reading of the *lectio divina*, a close meditative hermeneutic reading. In this reading practice the allegorical or metaphorical elements will be enlightened, the moral issues will be discussed and finally the anagogical sense will be revealed to

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Idem, p. 696

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

reach out to contemplation. This close reading will be shown in part 3: The Mystical Dynamics.

The lectio divina can be carried out scientifically and methodologically, since it is a method of reading which can be rehearsed, studied, planned, thought out and repeated. It is a method which can be applied to various kinds of literary texts, first by reading, then by finding the intention and meaning, looking for elements which reach out beyond the text. This should be carried out in full concentration, with a naked full awareness, to reveal the deeper dimension of the text. Lectio divina, traditionally encompasses lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio. This requires tedious, concentrated patience, since mystical works contain deep layers, full of inexpressible meanings waiting for expression. This accounts for the mystical dynamic hermeneutic reading approach.

The work will be analysed chronologically by quoting the subsequent fragments, followed by descriptive analyses. The parts written by the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* are quoted in italics. The researcher's analytical commentaries are in regular text blocks.

2.5.2 The narrative reading approach

In the narrative hermeneutic reading research the relationship between the monk/spiritual guide and the novice and the relationship between the author and the (implied) reader will be described and investigated.

Part 4 of the research will deal with the narrative dynamics. Seymour Chatman shows in his work *Story and discourse, a Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* an interesting theory on discourse on non-narrated stories concerning the different kinds of authors, narrators, readers and their points of view (real author, implied author, narrator, real reader, implied reader, narratee). D.F. Tolmie¹⁷⁰ supplies an interesting view on the implied author and implied reader.

The Book of Privy Counseling will be analysed chronologically by quoting the subsequent fragments, followed by descriptive analyses. In this research both the parts written by the author and his quotations will be quoted in italics. The researcher's analytical commentaries are in regular text blocks.

For some centuries scholars have been involved in ways of reading narrative texts. They constantly shifted their attention from the narrative dynamics of the text to a reconstruction of the way in which the text developed. For example, 'the last century has seen the flourishing of various methodological frameworks in this regard. *Source criticism* was developed with the aim of describing the way in which the authors edited and combined their sources in the process of writing. An important facet of narrative texts, namely that they are *narrative* texts, did not receive enough attention. However, during the last two decades attempts have been made to focus attention on the *narrative dynamics* of texts'.¹⁷¹

“Narratology” or “narrative criticism” can be defined as the systematic study of the typical features of narrative texts. Narratology is based on the assumption that certain characteristics (universals) are found in all narrative texts – from antiquity until modern times. These characteristics are then integrated and presented in terms of narratological frameworks that can be used for the analysis of individual narrative texts.¹⁷²

Herman Funkel (1862 – 1932) already drew attention to certain aspects of the narrative dynamics of texts. He discussed the artistic quality of Genesis, he pointed out the way in which the narratives were divided into “scenes”,

¹⁷⁰ Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, 1999

¹⁷¹ Idem, p. 1-2

¹⁷² Ibid.

the differences between main and secondary characters, the ways in which persons were characterised in the narratives, the use of dialogue, the importance of events in the structuring of the narratives – all aspects which are usually considered in a narratological analysis.¹⁷³

The narrative transition in *The Book of Privy Counseling*

It is fundamental to consider whether *The Book of Privy Counseling* is directly presented to the audience or whether it is mediated by someone. ‘Direct presentation presumes a kind of overhearing by the audience. Mediated narration presumes an expression of communication from narrator to audience. According to Seymour Chatman this is essentially Plato’s distinction between mimesis and diegesis, or, in modern terms: between showing and telling. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, ‘diegesis is the reporting or narration of events, contrasted with mimesis which is the imitative representation of them: so a character in a play that performs a certain action is engaged in mimesis, but if he/she recounts some earlier action, he/she is practising diegesis’.¹⁷⁴

Insofar as there is telling, there must be a teller, a narrating voice.¹⁷⁵ This is the case in *The Book of Privy Counseling* in which the teller, the narrator is the transmitting source.

To understand the concept of the narrator’s voice one needs to consider three preliminary issues: the interrelation of the several parties to the narrative transaction, the meaning of “point of view” and its relation to voice, and the nature of acts of speech and thought as a subclass of the class of acts in general.

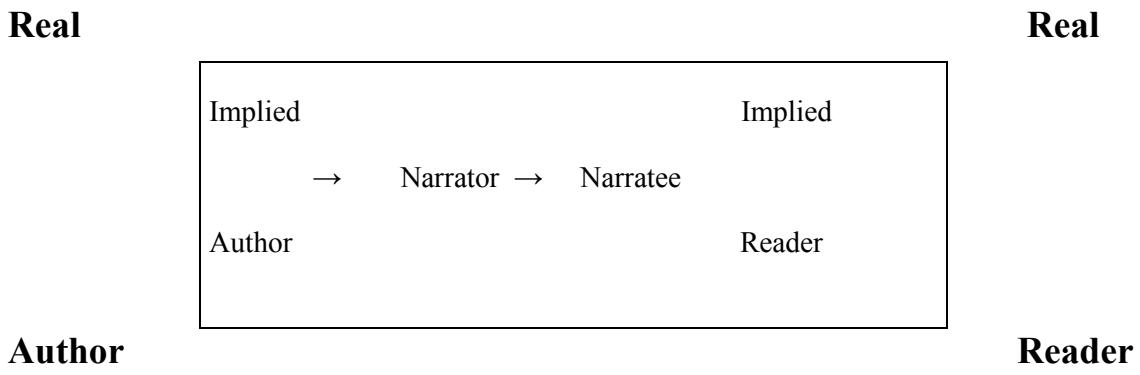
A basic framework is needed. Since the process whereby a narrative is transmitted from author to the reader must basically be viewed as a process of communication, it seems best to use a model to analyze this communicative process. Seymour Chatman developed one:¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Baldick, Ch. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford, 2001

¹⁷⁵ Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978, p. 146

¹⁷⁶ Idem p. 151 and Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, 1999, p. 6



In his framework Chatman visualises the “parties involved”. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the ‘parties involved’ are:

Real Author, Implied Author, Narrator (characterised as the Monk)

Real Reader, Implied Reader, Narratee (characterised as the Novice)

As already stated earlier the mystical text of *The Book of Privy Counseling* is of a spiral structure and it conjugates Chatman’s model, shifting from an interpersonal communication (between “the parties involved”) onto an inner dialogue in the counsellor and finally transforming into the Divine ‘Counsel’. The parties are more and more transformed.

The author presents his own process of insight so that this process of illumination will be accomplished in the novice. Since the author relates his work to God, by whom he is inspired, it is God who cultivates this process of transformation in the reader. What is being accomplished by God is being cultivated in *The Book of Privy Counseling*. God is the Counsel; however, the counsel is *not* God. God breaks through in the counsel. God is the Counsellor.

The structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling* is a circular spiral structure in which the parties play their roles and the narration accomplishes its form. Through this spiral circular structure the divine Counsel reveals itself. The six parties actively involved are: the real author, the implied author and narrator on the one hand, the real reader, the implied reader and narratee on the other hand. However it is only one who is actually speaking: the Counsel, radiated by God.

The author shows how God radiates through man: the incarnated God in Jesus Christ.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

The mystical text of *The Book of Privy Counseling* joins the model. The model moves and transforms from a narrative dynamics to a mystical dynamics. The author transforms into the counsel and the counsel transforms into the Counsel. The reader progresses and transforms more and more into the Counsel until all parties involved are joined in One.

Narratively speaking, there are six parties involved, or six roles, but there is only one actually speaking: the Counsel. It is the Counsel which sets the novice into motion.

The real author

The real author is the one whom we assume to have actually written *The Book of Privy Counseling*. He is hardly present and visible for the reader. Though he manifests himself in the narration at some crucial moments, when he refers to external sources or when he relates the (theological) doctrines from the church of his time to his counsel. The real author stands in his recognizable tradition and within this tradition he transfers his spiritual counsel in his own unique and profound manner.

The real author, the historical figure, the spiritual guide, applies the (written) counsel through the implied author and the narrator. The narrator is personified as the monk who transfers his spiritual counsel onto the implied reader and narratee. The narratee is personified as the novice and as the real reader.

In the foreword, at the beginning of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the reader is addressed as

*'My dear friend in God, this book is for you, personally, and not for the general public, for I intend to discuss your interior work of contemplation as I have come to understand it and you.'*¹⁷⁸

It may be assumed that the real author is revealing himself as the 'I' writing the book. At the same time the reader can become aware of the implied author being the 'I person' in the foreword as a stylistic means to transfer the counselling to the reader.

In the second chapter the real author seems to manifest himself stating that his counsel is meant for all those who are able to master his way of thinking:

It is not hard to master this way of thinking. I am certain that even the most educated man or woman, accustomed to a very primitive type of life, can easily learn it. Sometimes I smile to myself (though not without a touch of

¹⁷⁸ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 149

sadness) and marvel at those who claim that I write to you and others a complicated, difficult, lofty, and strange doctrine, intelligible to only a few clever and highly trained minds.

The real author makes an explicit contradictory statement against the theological conviction that a mystical relationship between man and God can only be achieved by theological or scientific hardship of a selected few. He argues that:

*It is a great pity and a sad commentary on the state of those supposedly committed to God that, in our day, not just a few people, but nearly everyone (excepting one or two of God's special friends, here and there) is so blinded by a mad scramble for the latest theology or discoveries in the natural sciences that they cannot begin to understand the true nature of this simple practice.*¹⁷⁹

As already stated in the introduction of part 2 the real author does not simply create an ideal, impersonal 'man in general', but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. It can be assumed that the implied author is the unique implied version of the real author of *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The real author transcends through the implied author who speaks through the words of the narrator, in this case, the monk.

Although the real author is omnipresent in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, he does not explicitly reveal himself until he refers to external sources to prove his theological insights by stating that:

*I am presuming that you have been absolved of your sins, general and particular, as Holy Church requires. Otherwise, I should never approve of you or anyone else beginning this work.*¹⁸⁰

The real author reveals his loyalty to the church through the implied author by stating that he would never give his consent to those who have not been absolved of their sins. He shows his approval to those who have been cleared from their sins and he emphasises the fundamental condition of having been absolved, in order to become capable of starting "this work". However, if the reader thinks she has done her best in this matter, she can take up this work.

All this you can verify with the authority of the Scriptures, the example of Christ, and the scrutiny of sound logic. As all men were lost in Adam when he fell from the love which made him one with God, so all those, who, by

¹⁷⁹ Idem, p. 151

¹⁸⁰ Idem, p. 153

*fidelity to their own path in life, manifest their desire for salvation, will receive salvation through the Passion of Christ alone.*¹⁸¹

The real author implicitly shows his presence by indirectly quoting from his previous work '*A Pistle of Discreciooun of Stirings*':

*As I already explained to you, this simple work is not a rival to your daily activities. For with your attention centred on the blind awareness of your naked being united to God's, you will go about your daily rounds, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, going and coming, speaking and listening, lying down and rising up, standing and kneeling, running and riding, working and resting.¹⁸² In the midst of it all, you will be offering to God continually each day the most precious gift you can make. This work will be at the heart of everything you do, whether active or contemplative.*¹⁸³

So, now and then the real author reveals himself in his counsel. He does not do so at random, there is a structure, a certain consistency to stress his statements concerning the mystical process which is not only meant for the complicated intellectual minds, but for the ones who truly feel attracted towards a mystical path leading to perfection. The author shows a way towards contemplation by marking stepping stones, like: be absolved from sins, be open, be whole. The work is not contradictory to her daily routine.

In chapter 11 of *The Book of Privy Counseling* it is unmistakably the real author who links *The Book of Privy Counseling* to his other works. He wants to show the consistency of his teachings concerning contemplation is beyond everything, provided they are authentic. He also wants to show the actual reason for his writing at this time:

*I will mention no particular virtue here for it is not necessary and besides, you have read about them in my other books. It will suffice to say that the contemplative work, when it is authentic, is that reverent love, that ripe, harvested fruit of a man's heart which I told you about in my little Letter of Prayer. It is The Cloud of Unknowing, the secret love planted deep in an undivided heart, the Ark of the Covenant. It is Denis' mystical theology, what he calls his wisdom and his treasure, his luminous darkness, and his unknown knowing. It is what leads you to a silence beyond thought and words and what makes your prayer simple and brief. And it is what teaches you to forsake and repudiate all that is false in the world.*¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Idem, p. 157

¹⁸² Cloud author, 'A Pistle of Discreciooun of spirites', in: Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises* 70/13 - 72

¹⁸³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 163

¹⁸⁴ Idem, p. 170

This quote shows the context of the paragraph in which the author reveals himself as the real author. He challenges his reader explicitly: “*Let me begin by asking you a question. Tell me, what is the substance of man’s ultimate, human perfection and what are the fruits of this perfection? I will answer for you. Man’s highest perfection is union with God in consummate love*”.¹⁸⁵

The real author reveals himself when he states his criteria concerning contemplation in which God is the chief worker, not the rational man:

*I make this point on purpose to refute the ignorant presumption of certain people who insist that man is the principal worker in everything, even in contemplation. Relying too much on their natural cleverness and speculative theology, they say that God is the one who passively consents, even in this work. But I want you to understand that in everything touching contemplation, the contrary is true. God alone is the chief worker here, and he will act in no one who has not laid aside all exercise of his natural intellect in clever speculation.*¹⁸⁶

Still, the real author remains visible in his work to state that his counsel is in accordance with the Holy Scripture. He protects the religious values based on the Holy Scripture stating three criteria which the reader should keep in mind:

*Nevertheless, in every other good work man acts in partnership with God, using his natural wit and knowledge to the best advantage. God is fully active here also, but in a different capacity, as it were. Here he consents to the act and assists man through secondary means: the light of Scripture, reliable counsel, and the dictates of common sense, which include the demands of one’s state, age, and circumstances in life. In fact, in all ordinary activities a man must never pursue an inspiration – be it ever so pious or attractive – until he has rationally examined it in the light of these three witnesses.*¹⁸⁷

Again to illustrate that his counsel is in accordance with the doctrines of the church he states:

*Certainly it is reasonable to expect a man to act responsibly. Holy Church expects this and by law and decree permits no one to become bishop (the highest degree of the active life) until he has determined by rigorous examination that he is capable of this office.*¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Idem, p. 169

¹⁸⁶ Idem, p. 179

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

It can be stated that the real author reveals himself in his work as the overall organizing principle that relates external sources, the mystical religious literature and the Church's doctrines with its theology to his 'Privy Counsel'.

The Implied author

The implied author is the hidden spiritual guide behind the narrator/Monk. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* it is the narrator/monk who is the actively present spiritual guide and who is explicitly counselling in dialogue with the narratee/novice. The implied author is the tell principle in *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

As already stated in the introduction the real author does not only simply create an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but he creates an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied author in other men's works. Whether the implied author is described as an 'official scribe' or the author's 'second self', 'it is clear that the picture the reader gets of his presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe'.¹⁸⁹

Seymour Chatman argues that in his concept the author is "implied". This means that the author is, in a way, "reconstructed" by the reader from the narrative. The implied author is not the narrator, but rather the 'principle that invented the narrator'.¹⁹⁰ Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. 'He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communication. It instructs the reader silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices to let us learn'.¹⁹¹ In the case of *The Book of Privy Counseling* the implied author resonates through the voice of the monk.

In the introduction it was stated that the concept "implied author" is liable to misunderstanding. Chatman offers two options or possibilities to define the concept: The first option is to define the implied author in the sense of "the author as implied by the narrative" or 'the idea of the author that is formed in the mind of the reader as he or she reads the narrative text'.¹⁹² The second option is to use the concept in a depersonalized sense. If it is used in this way, it is not defined primarily in terms of its relationship to the real author, but in terms of the narrative text itself. It is defined in terms

¹⁸⁹ Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978, p. 148

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

of the *overall textual arrangement*. In this sense the implied author can be defined as the organizing principle in the text, responsible for the total textual arrangement. Although the implied author has no direct means of communication (like the narrator), he instructs the reader through the design of the whole text.

Both options are relevant for *The Book of Privy Counseling*: in the first possibility the narrator functions as the representative of the implied author. In the second possibility the concept of the implied author in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, in a depersonalized sense, can be defined in terms of the overall textual arrangement. In the latter option or possibility, the implied author is not defined primarily in terms of being in a relationship to the real author but in terms of the narrative text itself. Then the implied author could be defined as the organizing principle of the text, responsible for the total textual arrangement. In this case the implied author has no direct means of communication, like the narrator. However, it is the implied author who instructs the reader through the design of the whole text. In this case there is a linguistic context as background with a narrator and narratee in the centre.

Even though the implied author has no voice or any direct means of communication he instructs the reader silently, through the design of the whole text and, in the case of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, through the voice of the monk. Through the voice of the monk the counsel is being transferred. Again: ‘However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe’.¹⁹³ The reader constructs in her mind a picture of the official scribe through the narrative. This means that the (real) reader may rely on it that the narrator in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, who behaves as a monk, is the monk (the author) himself, since the narrator seems to be an implied version of the author ‘himself’.

On the one hand it can be stated that the implied author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* resembles the first possibility, in which “the author is implied by the narrative” or “the idea of the author that is formed in the mind of the reader as she reads the narrative text. In this possibility the narrator functions as the implied author and vice versa. On the other hand it can be stated that the implied author resembles the second possibility in which it functions as the overall textual arrangement in terms of the narrative text itself.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* both possibilities are needed to articulate the ‘implied author’ as implied by the narrative and as the overall textual arrangement, which is of great relevance for the contemporary reader of the 21st century.

2.5.3 The mystagogic reading approach

Finally, in part 5, the research comes to a synthesis of the mystical and narrative dynamical readings in which the inner logic of the counsel reveals itself to the reader: the mystagogic implications.

The counsel shows its inner logic to the reader, who will become more and more aware of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. The counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the counsel and from the perspective of the reader. Therefore part 5 will deal with the three stages seen from both perspectives.

Mystagogic insight ‘sharpens the eye for a person’s final destiny’.¹⁹⁴ Discernment is a cognitive activity that distinguishes between someone’s factual situation from one’s perfection in God. It perceives a possible way to bridge the differences and it cooperates or supports someone to really go the way, knowing that it is God who moves someone to go on this way. Therefore it is necessary to notice the difference between the workings or action of the human subject and the workings or actions of God; that growth potentials transform in a possible way, in such a way that the authority of the Divine influential action won’t be frustrated.¹⁹⁵

It is stated that after Vatican II the notion of “mystagogy” played an important role in the early church. ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar differentiated between mysticism as actual experience, mystology as reflection on the experience and mystagogy as accompaniment in the direction of mystical experience’.¹⁹⁶ Karl Rahner extended the concept, ‘making it the initiation into a growing consciousness of existence in general. In his thinking it unfolds in three phases: it suspends the boundaries of human existence and the world, transforming them into expectant openness to the mystery of God, it introduces people to God’s gracious proximity in Christ, where God

¹⁹⁴ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality. Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 565

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Idem, p. 584

Himself becomes the principle of knowledge and volition and finally, it leads to knowledge with respect to one's own place and mission in the community of faith'.¹⁹⁷

'Mystagogy as the illumination of human existence is realised as being-questioningly-for-oneself and as reflection upon what exists against the background of the horizon of Being. The mystery delineates itself in it as an absolute being-there-for-oneself, as a complete act and being as such. The mystagogy of existence awakens the always-already-present contact with the Divine mystery beyond all being. But the mystery remains distant and still. It only lights up as a horizon. And human wings reach out with eager expectation. This happens, not in an abstract, metaphysical space, but as biography, delineating itself in the modifications of biographical pre-givens and developments'.¹⁹⁸

'A biographically-mediated mystagogy of existence reaches out to the self-articulating Mystery, the Mystery that breaks its silence, communicating itself to the self-transcendence which humans have discovered in themselves. The suspension of the boundaries of existence (in being = questioningly-for-oneself and reflectively gathering-up of what is) looks ahead to the fulfilment of grace. In it one can distinguish three accents':¹⁹⁹

1. God communicates himself in Grace. This Grace is uncreated. All created gifts of Grace unfold within this uncreated Grace. If Grace is fundamentally the Self-communication of God, then revelation is primarily the proximity of Divine mystery itself. The contents of faith are secondary.
2. Humans are so created that they are designed to receive this gracious proximity as an unexpected gift. God has only been given in human existence as infinite aspiration. But this reaching out to God stands permanently under God's offer of Grace. Mystagogy teaches us to lay bare the traces of the human search for God and of God's answer; hence 'it makes us read and accept the entire life of man as the history of divine encounter'.²⁰⁰
3. In Jesus Christ the self-transcendence of the created spirit and the Self-communication of God have been incarnated. In him the mystery of man and God has become manifest.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Idem, p. 588

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

It may be concluded, according to Kees Waaijman, that the ‘mystagogy of God’s gracious Self-communication to the seeking human being is a mystical-dialogical analysis of the Mystery of the divine encounter, an analysis in which the figure of Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian love-structure, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit, stand in the background’.²⁰² In this mystagogy the influence of the mystical traditions can be perceived.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the counselling shows a juxtaposition of mystical experiential teachings. This juxtaposition of teachings reveals crucial points which articulate shifts from the human act centre towards God’s workings. ‘Repetitions mark the circular process by which the centre of the person more and more moves out of the self. In the ecstasy the person is touched and drawn out of the self’²⁰³ in the workings of Grace, of God. In the process of the discernment of spirits one’s own logic of human self-determination is disturbed, so that the human desires transformation into an instrument of the divine will. In the loving union man’s desire transforms into Divine desire, of the Counsel. Man more and more transforms into the Loving Counsel itself in which he or she forgets him or herself. The perspective has shifted from man’s perspective into God’s Divine perspective.

2.6 Anthropological assumptions

This research includes the knowledge of some of the author’s anthropological assumptions which are relevant for the research. Some of them are: ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘mind’, ‘reason’, ‘imagination’, ‘will’ and ‘love’ (the faculties-the spirit- the body-thinking-feeling)

The medieval connotations of these terms are different from their contemporary connotations. Therefore these terms will be dealt with shortly.

Soul/spirit

‘Man, as St Augustine taught, consists of body and soul, everlastingly and indissolubly united in one substance (cf. 50/15-17). The soul, the inner man, is created in God’s image and likeness (Gen. i, 26). To the soul belong mind, reason and will, ‘secundum quas capaces Dei summus’.²⁰⁴ The image of the Uncreated Trinity is imprinted on the created structure of the human mind. As

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Huls, J. ‘Seuen Manieren van Minnen’ van Beatrijs van Nazareth. *Het mystieke proces en mystagogische implicaties*, Leuven, Peeters, 2002, p. 50

²⁰⁴ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xxxv

the Father generated the Word and the Holy Spirit precedes from both, so the mind comprehends the reason and the will. That ‘image’ is eternal, but through the Fall, man defaced the ‘likeness’.²⁰⁵

The words ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ tend to be interchangeable, but ‘soul’ is more general, and in many passages in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Book of Privy Counseling and related treatises* the two are distinguishable.²⁰⁶ Though of the same substance, the soul is the animating principle, the spirit its higher power, separable from the corporeal, and able to rise beyond itself.²⁰⁷ The ‘likeness’ will be restored when the soul is again ‘knit to God in spirite, & in oneheed of loue & accordaunce of wile’ (17/40-41). In the highest point of the spirit God is always latent, and there He is to be found. *Qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est cum illo.*²⁰⁸

Union is possible in ‘the highest & the souereynest pointe of the spirit’ (41/12 - 13 Middle English version). As in Benjamin Major,²⁰⁹ this peak (L. apex) is identified with the soul’s innermost depth:

The deptness of spirit, the which is the height....in goostlynes alle is one’ (41/24-25 in Middle English version).

Mind

According to Phyllis Hodgson ‘Mind’ represents the first of man’s three principal faculties, and it corresponds to St Augustine’s *Memoria*, alias *Mens*. ‘It not only knows itself as existent, but it also contains the past and the present, the memory of concrete things and sensations as well as abstract ideas, likewise the tenets of faith, and the results of the investigation of reason, and the experiences of emotion. Mind is passive, and ‘worched not itself’.²¹⁰

‘Reason and Will with their respective handmaids, Imagination and Sensuality, are active’.²¹¹ Reason and Will are called ‘principal’ for they ‘worchen in pure spirit withouten any maner of bodelines’ (64/35 Middle

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Idem, p. xxxvi. Cf. 49/14-15, P.C 77/40-42 Middle English version

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xxxvi (64/18-19 in Middle English version)

English Version). Imagination and Sensuality are subsidiary because they work through the senses.²¹²

In these times of the 20th and 21st century the mind stands for rational thinking and mental activity. In medieval times the mind was a more passive faculty, which can be labelled as a more receptive mind in modern terminology.

Reason

Reason is ‘man’s intellectual faculty, by Grace created in the image of God, Who is Intellectual Being’.²¹³

‘Reason is the ‘ize of þi soule’ (13/42, 39/38, middle English version), an Augustan image’.²¹⁴ Reason illuminated by Grace plays a major part in the ascent towards God. In *Benjamin Minor* Rachel (Reason) seeks for Wisdom. Through Joseph, her first-born son (Discretion), Reason learns to recognize sin and its remedy. Through meditation arising from reason the eye may be ‘opnid bi Grace for to see þi wrechidnes, þe Passion, þe kyndnes & þe wonderful werkes of God in his creatures bodily & goostly’. Reason establishes the proper intention of prayer, having recognized God as the highest Good.

Reason always seeks to know. Its operations and their achievement are often denoted by associated Middle English words as *can*, *kunnyng*, *pinking*, *knowing*, *understanding*. Images of what is real or imaginary (*fantasie L. phantasia*, lit. ‘making visible’) are essential before she can start.

‘Without imagination reason may not know’ (B.M. 129/19-20). Benjamin Major provided a widely accepted classification of the nature and grades of knowledge: through the senses, the imagination, the reason, the intellect or intelligence, and lastly intellectual intuition through Grace which transcends reason’s highest natural knowledge’.²¹⁵

‘Reason proceeds discursively by investigation and dialectic’²¹⁶ from one thing arriving at the knowledge of another.²¹⁷ *Understanding* denotes an ‘inner sight’, a grasp of some inherent significance: e.g. through true

²¹² Idem, p. xxxvii

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

meditation on the Scriptures the intelligence is illuminated by Grace with understanding. Thus to the very threshold of Unitive prayer reason acts as a guide, but there is the limit. There are no images by which reason can reach and know the Absolute Fullness of God as He is in Himself. Rachel dies when Benjamin (Contemplation) is born.²¹⁸ The further knowing mentioned in *The Book of Privy Counseling* (81/30-32 Middle English version), is a supra rational experience, divinely infused, ineffable, and above and beyond natural understanding. When the perfect soul is ‘illumined in þe reson by þe clere beme of euerlastyng lizt’ (p. 104/30 in Middle English version) the soul is ‘bleendid ... for habundaunce of goostly lizt’ (68/17 M.E. version).²¹⁹

Imagination

‘Imagination, Reason’s handmaid, is the mind’s image-forming power. As an intermediary between the bodily senses and the reason, it provides images from the outer world, from abstracts of which the reason can form concepts, and thus become able to rise to the knowledge of invisible things’.²²⁰

Will

‘The will is the affective faculty, which impels human affections (feeling) towards a chosen end. Classical psychology established the four fundamental affections from which all other feelings are composed: *Amor, Timor, Gaudium, Tristitia*’.²²¹

In contemplative prayer ‘will is “the louynge myst” to which God is ‘al comprehensible at the full’.²²² In contemplation the will lovingly consents to God’s workings.

‘In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the will and love are so closely akin that in many passages the words are interchangeable’.²²³ That they are distinguishable, however, can be seen in the recurrent phrase: ‘in oneheed of loue & accordaunce of wille’.²²⁴

Love

‘Love is an act of the will’.²²⁵ ‘The prescribed intent is to love God exclusively for Himself,²²⁶ ‘withouten mene’ (i.e. ‘intermediary’)²²⁷ and with

²¹⁸ Idem, p. xxxviii

²¹⁹ Ibid. and John 1:4,9

²²⁰ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xxxviii

²²¹ Idem, p. xxxix

²²² Idem, p. xxxviii-xxxix

²²³ Idem, p. xxxvix

²²⁴ Idem, p. xxxix

²²⁵ Ibid.

no mesure'.²²⁸ This degree of love for God is 'charity', the greatest of the theological virtues (1. Cor. XIII, 13). 'According to Pauline and Johannine theology in particular, therein lie the means for the restoration of the 'image', the soul, to God's likeness',²²⁹ and the interpretation of the Divine mystery of the working of God to draw the soul back to Him.²³⁰

*Its vitality (the interior work) is rooted and grounded in the glorious gift of love.*²³¹

'*Deus est Charitas*'. I John iv, 8 God is Uncreated Love. The Holy Spirit is God's love. Grace is a gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit. God's love for man has been revealed in the Creation and Redemption, and now again in the call of Grace to perfection. Thus 'we love God because He first loved us'²³² (I John, iv, 19). We love God with God's love.²³³

According to Phyllis Hodgson 'the orthodox concept of perfection is comprised in the succinct totality of the reiterated key phrase'.²³⁴

Knit to God by Grace in spirite & in oneheed of loue & accordance of the will (middle English version p. 77, lines 40 – 42)

*That Grace can bind you and make you spiritually one with the precious being of God.*²³⁵

Love alone can establish a unity, and that 'in spirite'.²³⁶ Though latent in every creature, 'in God, who is your ground of being and your singleness of heart'. 'God is there to be found in the sovereignest point'.²³⁷

'Concurrence of will is the essential beginning and end of such mutual love. God "wills" that all creatures exist solely for Himself, their Highest Good. The contemplative's intent is no other. Emptied of self-will, the cause of

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid. and Eph. 4,22-24; Col. 3,9-10

²³⁰ Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xxxix

²³¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p.161,

Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xxxix

²³² Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xl and Rom. 5,5; I Cor. 3,16; Gal. 2,20; Phil. 2,13; John 17,21-22; I John 4,12-13,16,17.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p.186

²³⁶ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. xl and I Cor. 6,17

²³⁷ Ibid.

alienation from God, and willing only what God wills, the soul is capable of being filled with the Divine life'.²³⁸

In contemplation God is and always must be allowed to be initiator. Man's active part is to prepare him- or herself to receive that gift of Grace to be knit to Him. The most purely spiritual operation of the will is the prayer of Aspiration. The work of preparation for it, taught in *The Book of Privy Counseling*, is the practice of the prayer of 'Love without knowing'.²³⁹

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Idem, p. xli

3. The Mystical Dynamics of *The Book of Privy Counseling*

In this part a monastic reading practice will be applied to the text of *The Book of Privy Counseling* in an actualized way, using the insights of the hermeneutic mystical reading of the lectio divina, a close meditative hermeneutic reading. As already stated in part 2 paragraph 2.5.1 hermeneutics is being understood as ‘the most essential level of close reading’.²⁴⁰ In this spiritual hermeneutic way of reading the research tries to come to the core, the deeper meaning, of the text.²⁴¹ In other words: hermeneutics will be applied as the reading method to realise a fundamental understanding of how God works through *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

3.1 Foreword

Right at the start the author directly addresses the reader in his foreword as:

‘*My dear friend in God*’,²⁴² indicating a mystical personal relationship between man and God. He not only addresses her as ‘My dear friend’ as such, but as ‘My dear friend in God’, assuming the presence of God. They are ‘friends in God’, not just friends, but friends who linger in God’s presence. The author addresses the reader as ‘*My dear friend in God*’, resembling Jesus Christ saying in John’s Gospel:

“*I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*”.²⁴³

Although this statement was a quite common standard expression in medieval times it completely encompasses the whole counsel. This statement is the essence of the counsel; the author relates this statement to the words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St John, in which Jesus Christ addresses his disciples as ‘Friends’. Jesus calls those friends, ‘who act in the way he tells them to. The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* expects the novice to do the same. Jesus addresses his disciples as friends, his equals, not as his servants, since a servant is unaware of what his lord does. Now he calls them his friends, since he informs them of and shares with them in everything he has learned from his Father. He wants to be on equal terms with his friends. This is similar to the kind of a relationship the author desires to have with his novice.

²⁴⁰ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 412

²⁴¹ Idem, p. 704

²⁴² Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 149

²⁴³ John 15:12-15

¹² This is my commandment, that You love one another, as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you. ¹⁵ I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends. because all things, whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you. ¹⁶²⁴⁴

To those who are willing to come along with Jesus and in this case with the author, the same will be revealed. Friends are equals, standing next to each other, assembled in the same (divine) relationship. In the gospel, Jesus tells them that it is not their own choice, but that He is the one who has chosen them to proceed and go the way to bring forward fruit that may be everlasting. Then God will give everything the disciple, the novice-reader(s) asks in Jesus' name. Jesus emphasises in John's Gospel that this is his command: that we love each other. In this sense the Gospel shows a mutual friendship in God towards all who share the same disposition, like the mutual friendship in God between the Monk and the novice. In this relationship the whole counsel finds its ultimate spiritual form.

In the book of *The Book of Privy Counseling* there is a constant tension between the specific novice and the general public, which will remain throughout the whole *Book of Privy Counseling*. However, if the general public, all those who might hear of it, should share the same interior dispositions, or natures, of being able to come to contemplation like the specific addressee, in this case the novice and reader, all the better. The author will even be delighted, like Jesus Christ in John's Gospel, who called those friends who act in accordance with his commandment. This counsel stands in its own disposition next to the Holy Scripture.

The monk calls his novice his spiritual friend in God, who is ready to enter contemplation, a new state of being, in which they become mutually related to each other in the divine realms of God.

Therefore, already from the beginning their relationship is being articulated and enunciated as a mutual relationship, though perhaps partially unknowingly from the side of the novice, who will grow in her awareness of being introduced and initiated into this mutual relationship with the author in God.

As far as the genre of communicative and personal narration is concerned the author states that: '*this book is for you, personally*'. Here the author speaks through the narrator to the narratee as the novice. It is a book, or

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

rather: a letter, not a verbal conversation, so the message is being transferred in written language by means of ‘this book’. The implied author and the narrator function as one entity which also counts for the narratee and the implied reader.

*‘This book is for you, personally and not for the general public’.*²⁴⁵

This book is meant for those for whom it is personally meant to be read. It is a personal private counsel, not a general treatise, which cannot be read without any personally spiritual involvement.

Already in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the author warns his reader to be careful to take time to read the work thoroughly, since the work is a whole unity and its parts are all related to each other to complete their divine meaning:

*I fear lest a person read only some parts and quickly fall into error.*²⁴⁶

His plan is to evaluate and discuss this work of contemplation, which is indicated as “interior work”, addressing internal processes of the narratee, whom it concerns. He intends to discuss one’s interior work of contemplation. He addresses those who share this interior disposition:

If I were writing for everyone, I should have to speak in general terms, but as I am writing for you alone, I will concentrate on only those things which I believe to be most personally helpful to you at this time. (P.C. p. 149)

So, if the implied author were writing for everyone disclosing the book, he would have to use a different kind of terminology, more general terms, which might differ from the idiom they both are used to, implying an inside mutual understanding or insight.

The author uses the terms ‘to speak’ and ‘writing’, which gives the impression of direct speech. In fact it is a writing activity, but the use of ‘to speak’ shows a direct way of communication. The implied author is ‘writing for you alone’, directly and personally, nothing in between. He concentrates on only those things which he believes or assumes to be most personally helpful to the narratee at this time. He concentrates only on those issues which are relevant or personally helpful at this time. Here, a limitation of relevance and time is explicitly mentioned. There is no discussion on things which are not helpful and things which are not important at this time. This means a concentration on this very moment itself and on the things which are helpful now, for the novice. The author carefully links his counsel to the contemplative level on which the novice finds herself.

²⁴⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 149

²⁴⁶ Idem, p. 44

After addressing the narratee-implied reader in a personal tone there is a shift in tone:

“Should anyone else share your interior dispositions and be likely to profit from this book also, all the better”.

Here the author opens his personal communication towards those who ‘share the interior dispositions’ of the narratee. He does this in the second half of the foreword, after having warned his ‘*dear friend in God*’ (*this book is for you, personally, and not for the general public*). Although he does not invite the general reader to continue reading, others are admitted entrance to this communication as well, provided they share the interior dispositions of the novice and provided they are likely to profit from this book.

It is the novice alone who the author has in mind, right now, at this very moment of speaking, but also at the very moment of the reading in the 14th century. The author has the interior life of the novice in mind as far as he has come to understand it and as far as the novice has come to understand it.

Finally the author concludes his foreword by addressing his following pages to ‘you (and others like you)’. The author speaks of ‘you and others like you’, but he does not speak of the way one is or the way the other is. He only speaks of ‘you and others like you’, who share the same interior disposition.

Now, the novice may feel welcome to continue reading, since all who feel contemplatively involved are friends in God.

3.2 Chapter 1

Like most of the chapters in *The Book of Privy Counseling* this chapter starts with an instruction followed by an imperative, which suits the didactics of this work. The author assumes that if one is going to pray, he retreats in order to be alone with an empty mind. The author is radical in his rejection of conceptualisation for which he already sets the tone in the first paragraph:

*'Put from your mind everything you have been doing or plan to do. Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil'.*²⁴⁷

No reflections or anticipations are expected. In the first sentence it is stated that '*you go apart to be alone for prayer*'. Not together, not among others, but apart and alone. The novice should reject all thoughts, whether they are good or evil. The mind has to be empty and clear, far from internal or external, rational or emotional turmoil.

To illustrate that thoughts are superfluous William Johnston states in his introduction to *The Book of Privy Counseling* that

*'God can be loved but he cannot be thought. God can be apprehended by love but never by concepts. So: less thinking and more loving'.*²⁴⁸

A thoughtless, empty mind in solitude forms the basic condition for prayer.

Praying should be done without words, unless 'you are really drawn to this'; the person whom it concerns, feels internally obliged or drawn to do so, forced by an aspiration. If one prays with words, no attention should be paid at all to whether these words are meaningful or not, whether they are official or not, whether they are formulated interiorly or exteriorly, as if one is surrendered by a continually abiding movement taking one along in its aspiring movement.

The only thing of vital importance is that the naked intent remains in the conscious mind without content. The author does not mean an unconscious mind, but a fully open conscious mind with a pure, naked intent to reach out to God. This naked intent is focused on the end perspective, which is God. It is the focus on the end perspective which sets the naked intent into motion. Therefore it is not enough to have nothing remaining in your conscious mind but you need a 'naked intent stretching out towards God'.

The author emphasises both the "vertical dimension" between man and God, to whom one stretches out and the "horizontal dimension" of existential being, which is empty, open and naked, stretching out to God.

²⁴⁷ Idem, p. 149

²⁴⁸ Idem, p. 9

By “stretching out” is meant reaching out to God, ascending to God, or descending into the deepest layers of existence, focusing onto God by following and concentrating on Jesus Christ who showed the way down into the deepest layer of existence and up to God.

The author argues that the novice should not have ideas about God, since God cannot be imagined. The author instructs the novice to empty her mind and leave all the ideas about God behind, what God is like or how God shows Himself in His works. She should only keep the simple awareness of God *that he is as he is*. The author prays the novice not to force God to be otherwise than being as He is. *God is as he is*. Man should not consider himself to be able to force God to resemble man’s image of God:

Let him be thus, I pray you, and force him not to be otherwise. Search into him no further, but rest in this faith as on solid ground. (P.C. p. 150)

Faith is compared to solid ground to show its fundamental importance. Faith must be the fundament instead of any rational conceptualisation of God. The novice should not search but rely on this faith in God.

The awareness of being deliberately bound and anchored in faith, stripped of ideas, will leave the novice’s thought and affection in emptiness, fully aware of her own being.

It will feel as if your whole desire cried out to God and said:

*That which I am I offer to you, O Lord,
Without looking to any quality of your
Being but only to the fact that you
are as you are; this, and nothing more.* (P.C. p. 150)

Man’s desire reaches out beyond rationality and the senses, crying out to offer one’s self to God. The author illustrates what it feels like when the awareness of being is left in a naked thought and blind feeling of one’s own being. Our whole being has to be offered to God, without any critical commentary or analysis of any qualities of God’s being. The author emphasises the fact that not only should man linger in his naked awareness of his blind being but also abandon every thought and affection. The same counts for God. God is as he is. Man is as he is. Therefore one should think similarly of God as he thinks himself or herself.

Man should not reflect on the self. Man ‘should accept that truth which enables us to grow towards mature Christians: once we are ‘in God’ we have the One who gives us inner unity and a purpose in our lives. We should keep in mind that this is not purely and solely an intellectual attitude, but it is something we must do despite what our thoughts and

feelings would make us believe'.²⁴⁹ Thoughts and feelings are faculties which can disturb man's naked, pure being. In prayer man should take an attitude of simply being present, nothing more and nothing less.²⁵⁰

The author uses metaphors, though as empty as possible, to tempt the novice-reader's blind imagination, beyond any form, to make it humanly possible to understand his counsel. He challenges the novice to exceed all imagination. Therefore he adds the metaphor to illustrate the emptiness and to help the novice to continue the process blindly: *Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you.* (P.C. p. 150). The author does not say that the quiet darkness should *fill* your whole mind, but it should *be* the whole mind and *be* like a mirror. No conceptions, ideas or affections, but a quiet darkness. The novice should deny everything that obstructs or blocks herself to direct the self to God, in order to be united with God. The novice should avoid all sidesteps in order to open herself to God since God is the cause of Mankind and the centre of our being. And therefore the author shows his arguments for his didactic counselling by saying:

for I want your thought of self to be as naked and as simple as your thought of God, so that you may be spiritually united to him without any fragmentation and scattering of your mind. (P.C. p. 150)

Here the author directs his counsel to the perspective of the spiritual union of man to God. If the novice's self-directed thought dissolves into a naked thought of self and God then she will be spiritually united with God.

The quiet darkness is an empty darkness which *is* God. God is the dark quiet darkness: existence itself. Then the novice *may* be spiritually united with God. In other words: there is a possibility to be spiritually united with God if God admits her to become united. However, there is a difference between God and man:

God is our being and in God we are what we are. God is *our* cause and God is the deep centre of *our* being. We are not God's cause and we are not God's being. God and man are separated in nature but essentially united with each other. The author does not argue that man and God are united in each other; there is a distinction between man and God. God is the cause of man's being, but man is not the cause of God's being. The realisation of this is the beginning of contemplation.

The author qualifies his written counsel as a contemplative work. This assumes a certain expertise and knowledge of the standards a contemplative work should meet. The reader should be aware of what a contemplative

²⁴⁹ Cooper, A. *The Cloud of Unknowing; Reflections on selected texts*, Turnbridge Wells, Kent, Burns & Oats, 1991, p. 50

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

work should be, otherwise misunderstanding would arise. Here both the author and reader should come to terms concerning the genre, since it is essential to be aware of the fact that a contemplative work contains both the horizontal and the vertical relation. This is explicitly mentioned in the work, but also experienced through the work, which should show the mystical dynamics in and of the work itself.

God, who is all, is author and reader, monk and novice. Therefore, the reader gets room to be part of the contemplative mystical dynamic relationship.

The author reacts that it *is true* that only God is his own cause and his own being and that everything, the whole creation, exists in God:

It is true that everything exists in him as in its source and ground of being and that he exists in all things, as their cause and their being. (P.C. p. 150)

The author does not leave room for doubt, he states: *And since this is so.* Everything exists and originates from him, God, who exists in everything of which he is the cause and very being.

So, the author states that it is so and *since this is so, let Grace unite your thought and affection to him.*²⁵¹ Admit Grace to bind your thoughts and affections and feelings to Him. In other words: your thoughts and affections are bound and completely united with the thoughts and affections/feelings of God. Your thoughts and feelings are transformed by Grace.

The author continues instructing his reader/novice: leave this, so that Grace may touch you and nourish you. Be merciful. Let Grace touch and nourish you with the experiential knowledge as a “new awareness” of God as he really is. The adjective ‘experiential’ indicates a specific quality to knowledge. Not intellectual knowledge but experimental knowledge is being required to know God as He really is.

Here the author indicates God as the one who ‘Is’. “God really is”.

However, the author states that in this life this experience will always remain dark and partial, so that your longing desire for Him is ever newly enkindled.²⁵²

Look up joyfully, then, and say to your Lord, in words of desire:

*That which I am I offer to you,
Oh Lord, for you are it entirely.* (P.C. p. 151)

²⁵¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:17

²⁵² Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12

The author makes a clear distinction between the contemplative experience of God in this mortal existence, which will remain dark and partial, and the hereafter. Even though the contemplative experience of God remains dark and partial in this mortal existence, Grace will unite man's thought and affection to Him and touch man with the experimental knowledge of God. This contemplative touch will fill the novice with a longing desire to be united with God. The possibility left is to offer oneself, for it is God entirely! In other words: one is God entirely. *That which I am I offer to you, for you are it entirely.* (P.C. p. 151)

The author warns the novice to “*Go no further, but rest in this naked, stark, elemental awareness that you are as you are*”. (P.C. p. 151) Again: go no further than to offer that which you are, for that is God entirely. Both the divine and the human dimensions have been taken into consideration to help the novice to continue the contemplative development. This is the crossing point in which one can rest.

Reflection: in this first chapter the author has laid the spiritual foundation of *The Book of Privy Counseling* by teaching the novice how to be and what the divine perspective is of the counsel.

The novice has learned that she has to clear her mind completely to be capable of loving God, since God cannot be grasped in any thoughts, fantasies or concepts. A strong metaphor is used to support the novice to step into the process blindly:

Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you. (P.C. p. 150)

God is the quiet darkness and therefore one should think and feel about God in the same way as about himself to be fully spiritually united to God.

3.3 Chapter 2

Illustrative for the circular process, the author continues his counsel by referring back and heading forward. The spiral, circular structure of the work is evident here: first referring to his previous statement and then heading forward by adding that the most uneducated person, living in a one-dimensional state of being, can easily grasp it.

The author argues that especially those who have profoundly and intellectually trained themselves in spiritual matters, find it much hardship. They are the ones who find it hard to realise *that* they are and find it difficult to be aware of their being.

No complex reasoning is needed to master “this way of thinking”²⁵³ of “leaving your thought quite naked, your affection uninvolved and your self simply as you are”.²⁵⁴

Then the author reflects on the way in which he experiences his own self and on his narrative communication with other scholars in a meta-communicative way:

I smile to myself (though not without a touch of sadness), and marvel at those who claim that I write to you and others a complicated, difficult, lofty, and strange doctrine, intelligible to only a few clever and highly trained minds. (P.C. p. 151)

The author shows his disappointment by mentioning ‘*a touch of sadness*’, even though his speech is somewhat ironical about well-educated scholars, who consider his work so “*difficult, showing a strange doctrine, intelligible to only a few intellectuals*” (P.C. p. 151), while he experiences his work as simple, since it cannot be reasoned. Here, the author especially addresses the scholars and learned theologians to show them the importance of working towards a true blind awareness and a naked being. Then, he expresses his disappointment towards *those supposedly committed to God*:

To these people in particular I want to reply: (P.C. p. 151)

It is a great pity and a sad commentary on the state of those supposedly committed to God that, in our day, not just a few people, but nearly everyone (excepting one or two of God’s special friends, here and there) is so blinded by a mad scramble for the latest theology or discoveries in the natural sciences, that they cannot begin to understand the true nature of

²⁵³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 151

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

this simple practice; a practice so simple that even the most uneducated peasant may easily find in it a way to real union with God in the sweet simplicity of perfect love. (P.C. p. 151)

He does not only address his novice, he explicitly addresses the others who are not directly involved in the conversation between the author and the novice. Here, the implied reader has become the real reader and those readers who consider themselves *supposedly committed to God* are being grieved upon by the author, since they are so blinded by their curiosity about the latest scientific discoveries and theology that they cannot even begin to understand the real nature of this simple practice, which enables even the simplest person to find a way to real union with God.

Moreover, the author criticises those who seem to be committed to God. They find so much hardship in understanding the true nature of this simple practice. This seemingly simple practice heeds the true nature of coming to real union with God. The way to real union with God lies in this light work with a “sweet simplicity of perfect love”, which articulates a taste, a sweet taste of perfect love in which man is united with God, already in this life. Theology and natural sciences can help people to understand up to an intellectual level, but this work exceeds this rational work and demands the skill of relying on God’s love.

The assumption that mystical experiences are the results of complex and tedious exercises cannot resist reality. The author argues that mysticism is open to common people with common sense. Theology or science appears to be more obstructive than helpful to come to contemplation, since they study contemplation, while contemplation has to be experienced. To reach contemplation one has to know or to realise and experience *that one exists*. The simple fact of existence itself, not *what* and *how* you are, but *that you are*, is fundamental. Every intellectual or analytical activity is left behind. One should go down or descend into the intense and total experience of one’s own being. This means a total realisation of one’s being. In other words: the experience of *that one Is*. To do so and realise this, one does not need any specific knowledge or education.

“Everyone exists and therefore everyone is capable of gaining mystical experience”²⁵⁵.

Considering the above-mentioned view the author shows some irony in his expression concerning the assumed complexity of mysticism:

²⁵⁵ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introduction to Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten’, in: Servotte, H. *Spiritualiteit*, Nijmegen, Gottmer, 1984, pp. 5-6

Unfortunately, these sophisticated people are no more capable of understanding this truth in sincerity of heart than a child at his ABC's is able to understand the intricacies of erudite theologians. (P.C. p. 152)

Despite the irony the reader can find a parallel with the biblical expression: 'if thou art not as children thou will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven'.²⁵⁶ A child has a pure realisation and experience of being, of life itself and it is therefore well-capable of unmasking the intricacies or complexities of intellectuals. Still, the author "invites" the reader to examine his work rationally, since then they would find out its clarity and lucidity and realise that it is a simple work:

Yet, in their blindness, they insist on calling such a simple exercise deep and subtle; whereas, if they examined it rationally, they would discover it to be as clear and plain as the lessons of a beginner. (P.C. p. 152)

Now, a transition in the counsel can be detected, since here the author becomes strict and severe to emphasise the fundamental essence of his teachings:

Surely it is beginner's fare, and I consider him hopelessly stupid and dull who cannot think and feel that he is; not how or what he is, but that he is. (P.C. p. 152)

People can think about their qualities and their characteristics, but they would be incredibly stupid and dull if they cannot realise their very existential being: *that we are*.

The author uses more metaphors and shows even some sarcasm to get his message through since here a very fundamental existential issue is being dealt with:

Such elemental self-awareness is obviously proper to the dumbest cow or most unreasonable beast. (I am being facetious, of course, for we cannot really say that one animal is dumber or more unreasonable than another). (P.C. p. 152)

This elemental self-awareness is the very fundament for this contemplative work, otherwise one will lose oneself in creation, remaining on the superficial level depending on images of who, what or how one is. This would be disastrous in the monk's/author's view:

But it is only fitting for a man to realise and experience his unique self-existence, because man stands apart in creation, far above all the beasts, as the only creature Graced with reason. (P.C. p. 152)

²⁵⁶ Matthew 18: 3-5

In accordance with the Bible the author considers man's uniqueness and superiority, far above the beasts and apart in creation, being the only creature gifted with reason.

Here the reader finds an apparent contradictory tension: on the one hand the previous teachings of the counsel tell the reader to postpone rational reason since it hinders man to realise union with God and on the other hand the author argues that man stands far above the beasts as the only creature graced with reason. This is only an apparent contradiction since man does not stand apart from creation but apart in creation. The author considers man the only creature graced with reason. Reason is the most important characteristic of man standing in creation. As far as the author shows it is only fitting for a man to realise and experience his unique self-existence.

In order to achieve the realisation and experience of self-existence the author teaches his novice in his counsel to do the following:

And so, go down to the deepest point of your mind and think of yourself in this simple, elemental way. (Others will mean the same thing, but because of their experience, speak of the mind's "pinnacle" and of this awareness as the "highest human wisdom"). (P.C. p. 152)

Going down to the deepest point of the mind, away from complex introspection and reflection, one can think of oneself in this simple elemental way in which one realises *that* one is. Since the author does not use the word 'elementary' here, but the word 'elemental' it might leave room for different meanings: fundamental, basic, motivated by or symbolic or primitive and powerful natural forces or passions, relating to earth, air, water, and fire considered as elements, relating to atmospheric forces, wind, rain and cold, another definition of elemental: a spirit or force that is said to appear in physical form.

These are metaphors to visualise and illustrate the counsel in such a way that everyone is able to understand.

As far as the author is concerned about his terminology, he refers to others who might mean the same, "but" they consider the deepest point of our mind as the "highest human wisdom". The contradictory adverb 'but' implies a difference in opinion between the author and others as far as the deepest point, which lies deeper than the mind's pinnacle, is concerned.

In this *Book of Privy Counseling* a similar movement in man can be detected towards God by means of a deepening of consciousness. The more

man lingers and lives from the depths of his consciousness, the more he will achieve wholeness and completeness.²⁵⁷

If one spends time on thinking *what* one is, it demands tedious analytical intellectual reasoning and introspection in order to define *what, how, who* one is, but if one spends time on thinking *that* one is one is able to go down to the deepest point of one's mind and think of oneself in this simple elemental way in which one *is*.

The author assumes the novice has already spent much time on introspection with God's Grace and now he expects her to be ready for this work since he assumes the novice/the reader to know what she really is: *a human being by nature and a pitiful wretch through sin.* (P.C. p. 152)

Now, time has come to stop the introspection and to forget all about it. One should stop considering what one is, since one is a pure human being by nature and a pitiful, fallen wretch through sin. Here the author refers to the Fall of Adam and Eve.²⁵⁸ Now time has come to open up to an elemental self-awareness of *that one is* and in this awareness, of *that one is*, there is no need for further abstruse introspection.

Here the reader experiences a sense of dialogue in which the author asks and reacts as if he has received an affirmative reaction from his novice:

Well, do you know this? Yes, and probably you feel that you know only too well, from experience, the defilements that follow and befall a man because of sin. Fie on them! Forget them, I pray you. Reflect on them no further for fear of contamination. (P.C. p. 152)

The author tells the novice to reject sin and not to pay any attention to the defilements anymore for fear of contamination. According to Austin Cooper (The Cloud of Unknowing), the main message of The Holy Bible is to make man aware of the need for redemption in order to direct the self to God. Man should not expose the self to self-analyses which led to depression and despair.²⁵⁹ The author argues that self-reflection leads to more and more self-reflection, without any progress in approaching the self or God. He does not deny the importance of self-reflection; he even considers it a Grace, though to a certain extent. He even prays that his novice will turn away from sin and turn herself towards her existential self-awareness:

²⁵⁷ Rogers, D.J. 'Psych technological Approaches to the teaching of the Cloud-Author and the Showings of Julian of Norwich', in: *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, 2, ed. Glasscoe, M., University of Exeter, 1982, p. 152

²⁵⁸ Genesis 3

²⁵⁹ Cooper, A. *The Cloud of Unknowing; Reflections on selected texts*, 1991, p. 50

Instead, remember that you also possess an innate ability to know that you are, and that you can experience this without any special natural or acquired genius. (P.C. p. 152)

Man has an innate ability to realise that he is: “everyone exists and should therefore be capable of gaining mystical experience”.²⁶⁰

Now, the author presumes that the novice has been absolved from her sins, assuming a pure state of mind, otherwise he would never approve of her or anyone else beginning this work. Sins cause a fragmentation and trouble her naked pure being. Therefore she should have been absolved from her sins. Here both the novice and the reader(s) are explicitly addressed and warned before they continue the process. The author expects the novice to have done her utmost. This seems contradictory to what was stated before when the author stressed the fundamental awareness of her naked being. Still, the author requires an absolution of her sins as proof of her pure, naked intent. The author stands in a spiritual tradition of the Holy Church of Christ, which requires absolution of sins, general and particular, universal and individual to be sure that one is fundamentally aware of one’s being with a pure intent.

Otherwise, I should never approve of your or anyone else beginning this work. But if you think you have done your best in this matter, take up this work. You may still feel the burden of your sin and wretchedness so terribly that you are uncertain what is best for yourself, but do as I tell you now. (P.C. p. 153)

The teaching counsel goes on, strictly, mildly and gently. The author shows severe strictness by saying that he would never approve of anyone beginning this work if he has not been absolved of sins. Still he invites the novice to take up the work assuming that she has done her utmost.

It is quite a directive counsel: *do as I tell you!*

Here the author concretely starts his instructions by saying: “you are uncertain what is best for yourself, but do as I tell you now”. (P.C. p. 153) The novice has just taken her decision and has shown commitment, otherwise the dialogue between the author and the novice would have come to an end here. So: an inner decision to start the work has been taken.

The author tells the novice to take “the good gracious God” just as He is, relying on the mutual understanding between him and the novice, since he has already explained this concept earlier: God being the one who is as He is, stripped of attributes or any other ideas. The novice has to lay God over her sick self, just as she is, as a seal. In order to make his statement clear the author compares his expression by illustrating an example from the

²⁶⁰ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introduction’ *Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*, 1984, p. 6

bible in which the sick woman touches Jesus' garment in the belief that, if she would only touch one small part or piece of His garment, she would be healed. The author promises his novice that she will not only be healed physically but also spiritually by this "sublime work in which your desire reaches out to touch the very being of God, beloved in himself". (P.C. p. 153)

So far the first instruction, now the following:

Step up bravely, then, and take this medicine. Lift up your sick self, just as you are, to the gracious God, just as he is. Leave behind all inquiry and profound speculation into your being or His. (P.C. p. 153)

The author orders the novice to step up bravely and take this medicine. Not just beginning, but step up bravely, as if courage is needed. Stand up right, go and take this medicine, which is God self. God is the cure. *Lift up your sick self, just as you are, to God, just as he is.* Offer yourself, as you are, to God. No speculations into His or your being. Nothing matters except the will to offer your blind awareness of your naked being joyfully to God. Here the author appeals to the will of the novice. The novice must willingly offer her blind awareness, so that Grace can bind her and make her spiritually one with God's being. It is Grace that can bind the novice and make her spiritually united with God's being. The author does not write 'God', but 'God's being' as if there is a distinction between God and God's being. *The precious being of God, simply as he is in himself.* (P.C. p. 153) God is in Himself. As soon as man touches God he will be healed, like the woman in the Gospel who testified to this when she said:

*If I but touch the hem of his garment I shall be healed.*²⁶¹

Here the author refers to the Gospel to stress the touch of eternal health like in this work in which her *desire reaches out to touch the very being of God, beloved in himself*.²⁶²

Reflection: in this chapter the author leads his novice deeper into his work of trust. The novice has gained the insight that rational reasoning does not bring her to contemplation, but the experience *that she is* helps her to find a way to a real loving union with God. The elemental self-awareness is the very fundament in this contemplative work. The novice may feel a full self-acceptance in offering the blind awareness of her naked being to be bound by Grace and be spiritually one with God: a mutual self-acceptance both of God, who simply is as He is, and the novice, who is as she is.

²⁶¹ Matthew 9:21; Mk. 5:28

²⁶² 1 Corinthians 6: 17

3.4 Chapter 3

The author goes ahead admitting the struggle between ‘this practice’ of contemplation, which he has explained and illustrated in the previous chapter, and the earthly desires which he calls ‘faculties’. He knows the struggle and the conflict from his own experience. This supplies a personal, warm dimension to the counselling in which the spiritual guide admits having experienced the struggle himself.

He describes the struggle as if it were a battle between ‘this practice’ and the desires of the ‘undisciplined faculties’, the senses, which demand more useful or more worthwhile activities that yield up to something which is more suitable in the eyes of those who do not feel attracted towards ‘this practice’. The undisciplined faculties are the unruly senses that long for earthly, material satisfaction, which the author describes as: *the undisciplined faculties finding no meat to feed upon.* (P.C. p. 154)

It is a severe battle since here the novice should give up all earthly desires if she wants to continue this process. This again is a decisive step since each earthly longing has to transform into a divine longing. This is confusing since it goes beyond everything she is used to longing for.

The author puts his trust in his novice by confirming her progress by stating that she has become engaged in this work. Still the author admits the pitfalls of the faculties that do not appreciate this work as valuable:

For you are now engaged in a work so far beyond their accustomed activity that they think you are wasting your time. But their dissatisfaction, inasmuch as it arises from this, is actually a good sign; since it proves that you have gone on to something of greater value. (P.C. p. 154)

The struggle itself can be considered as a good sign, since it proves that this work is contrary to and far beyond the earthly treasures.

‘This work’ cannot be achieved through the senses, it is ‘far beyond their accustomed activity’ and it does not satisfy their needs so it seems a waste of time. The author explicitly stresses the importance of ‘this’ and not another (ascetic) activity: the dissatisfaction should arise from ‘this’ and then it is a good sign since this draws the novice to something of greater value. The author is delighted since there is nothing in his view that can bring him ‘so near to God and so far from the world, as this naked, quiet awareness of his blind being which he joyfully offers to God. So, why should he not be delighted?

As a didactic he illustrates his own experience to his novice and uses his own experience as an ultimate argument to show that there is nothing in his

view that can bring him closer to God than offering his quiet awareness of his blind being to God.

The author tells the novice to refuse to feed the senses by “intricate speculations about the details of your being to gnaw on”.²⁶³ However, he does not deny the usefulness of meditations which certainly have their place and value, but compared to the “blind awareness of your being and your gift of self to God” they disrupt the “wholeness” which is so necessary to a deep encounter with God. Man should be “whole”. Wholeness is needed to meet God, not fragmentation. He continues stressing the vital importance of remaining “whole” in the encounter with God:

*Therefore, keep yourself recollected and poised in the deep centre of your spirit and do not wander back to working with your faculties under any pretext no matter how sublime.*²⁶⁴ (P.C. p. 154)

Here follows a new instruction, relating the counsel to Proverbs:

Heed the counsel and instructions which Solomon gave to his son when he said:

*Worship the Lord with your substance
And feed the poor with your first fruits.
Thus shall your barns be filled with abundance
And your presses run over with wine.*²⁶⁵ (P.C. p. 154)

In Proverbs Solomon instructs his son to worship God with his whole being, which are his first fruits, his very existence. Here both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions are being stressed: the worship of God with his whole substance and feeding the poor with his first fruits. If you do so your life will be abundantly filled: your presses run over with wine.

The author explains this quotation to his novice:

Solomon said this to his son but take it as addressed to yourself, and understand it spiritually, according to the sense in which I, standing in his place, now explain it to you. (P.C. p. 155)

The author continually explains, illustrates his counsel leaving no room for misunderstandings. Here he projects the message on to himself and the novice, but he also projects Solomon’s relationship with his son to himself and the novice; the monk/author standing in Solomon’s place and the novice in his son’s place. So, he starts his translation of Proverbs to the novice-reader:

²⁶³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 154

²⁶⁴ Philippians 3:13

²⁶⁵ Proverbs 3:9-10

My dear friend in God, go beyond your intellect's endless and involved investigations and worship the Lord our God with your whole being. (P.C. p. 155)

He explicitly addresses his novice again as 'My dear friend in God' since they both linger in God. 'My dear friend' is equal to 'Me'; here the reader again can become aware of the equality between the author and the novice. 'We' are 'in God', equally united in God. In this capacity the novice should go beyond endless self-reflections and worship God with her whole being. This does not seem to be sufficient: the author goes a step further: "offer Him your very self in simple wholeness, all that you are and just as you are". Worship implies a dialogue between two entities in which one adores the other. Offering yourself, however, implies complete surrender, giving away yourself. Here not only giving away your very self is meant, but also in undivided "simple wholeness", completely whole *that* you are and just as you are. No matter how you are or stressing any special quality of your being. This is the way in which the attention and affections will not be distracted or dependent since they would fragment the single wholeness of the heart and distract the novice from her union with God.

The author interprets Proverbs 3: 9- 10 as: "*and with your first fruits feed the poor*".²⁶⁶

The author uses "the first fruits" as the metaphor for man's self, his own being, which one has received from God as a "God-given gift". The author emphasises the vital importance of the first fruits being the most outstanding gifts of nature and Grace offered to man from his creation and which has nurtured him until now. The novice's being is called the first of her fruits.

By nature man is able to come to an existential awareness of the self which has been gracefully supplied to him by God. The first fruits (being harvested) are man's very being. Here the author shows his novice the crossing of the relation God – man and the relationship between fellow human beings. It is not enough to nourish the self, the novice is also obliged to nourish others, who are brothers and sisters by nature or Grace. It is the novice's task to show God's presence by sharing her own being. Sharing our 'Being' is Grace. But our very 'Being' is also grace since it is God's Gift. 'Being' for God is nature.

Even if the novice-reader thoroughly analyses her qualities she will finally be faced with her naked being:

If you begin to analyse thoroughly any or all of man's refined faculties and exalted qualities (for he is the noblest of God's creatures), you will come at

²⁶⁶ Proverbs 3:9-10

length to the farthest reaches and ultimate frontiers of thought only to find yourself face to face with naked being itself. (P.C. p. 155)

He expresses his appreciation for his novice as “such a noble being”, as one who realises that she *is* and who realises and recognises her very existence in God. Being noble in those medieval times was only meant for those who belonged to the upper-class nobility. Then it was impossible for laypersons to become related to noble people of the aristocracy. It was impossible to become a noble man or woman. He does not only characterise his novice as noble, but even as ‘such a noble being’ Therefore this remark made by the author may be interpreted in two ways: socially and spiritually. In the spiritual sense one is a noble being and one can become conscious of it. Being noble in the spiritual sense therefore exceeds mortal worldly nobility. In this spiritual nobility God is the origin.

The author seems to make a distinction between ‘you’ and ‘your being’ when he states that: He ‘gifted you with being’ as if there is a distinction between ‘you’ and ‘being’.

The author tells the novice that analyses and meditations would only lead half-way, since:

At first you might say, “I am; I see and feel that I am. And not only do I exist but I possess all sorts of personal talents and gifts”. But after counting up all these in your mind, you could still go a step farther and draw them all together in a single all-embracing prayer such as this:

*That which I am and the way I am,
with all my gifts of nature and Grace,
you have given to me, O Lord, and you are all this.
I offer it all to you, principally to praise you
and to help my fellow Christians and myself. (P.C. p. 156)*

The novice does not only exist, she also possesses all kinds of personal talents and gifts. Existence is expression of being; talents and gifts can be considered as ways of expression of her being. There has to be a direct, pure one-dimensional relation between her talents and gifts and her being. In other words: being is an all-embracing prayer encompassing the novice in God’s praise to help the fellow Christians and the self.

Here, in this prayer, a shift in awareness has been initiated from self-awareness of her being with her talents and gifts to the awareness of the fact that God is all this. God is all, including the novice with all her talents and gifts.

In this all-embracing or all-encompassing prayer, man gives away oneself completely in order to praise God, to help others and himself. All this

exceeds meditations which will come to an end. Now the novice is faced with her naked being. In the offering of her existence and in the acknowledgment of Being as God's Being, she offers her being and her (presence) existence to God.

Now the novice has become aware of the fact that God is all, inclusively of herself with all talents and gift, time has come for the author to tell the novice to offer this all to God, in the first place, in order to praise God and to help and serve her fellow Christians, who are '*brothers and sisters by nature of Grace*'²⁶⁷, and also to help her and 'myself'!

The author continuously repeats and rephrases his message to his novice to deepen her awareness adding new deepening dimensions to his counsel, arguing that in the end she will find herself on the essential ground of being with the naked perception and blind awareness of her being. Here again an apparent distinction is made between 'finding oneself on the essential ground of being' (P.C. p. 156) and having a '*blind awareness of your own being*' (P.C. p. 156). The blind awareness of her being is a condition to find herself on the essential ground of being.

The author repeats his arguments for her being as the first of her fruits: "that is why your being alone can be called the first of your fruits".²⁶⁸ However, it is not only a repetition to emphasise the importance of being as the first fruits but the author wants to come to a new deepening of the process stating that even this activity will have come to an end:

So it is that naked being takes first place among all your fruits, all others being rooted in it. But now you have come to a time when you will no longer profit by clothing or gathering into your awareness of naked being, any of all of its particulars, by which I mean your fruits, upon which you have laboriously meditated for so long. (P.C. p. 156)

Now it is enough to worship God perfectly with your substance, that is, with the offering of your naked being. This alone constitutes your first fruits; it will be the unending sacrifice of praise for yourself and for all men that love requires. (P.C. p. 156)

For the time being it is enough for the novice to worship God with her substance, which is her naked being. The novice has come to the point of even offering her naked being to God, after having stripped her naked being from any particulars or fruits which she has laboriously meditated upon. This naked being constitutes her first fruits and it will be an unending sacrifice of praise for herself and for all men that love requires. Offering

²⁶⁷ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p 155

²⁶⁸ Idem, p. 156

implies a divine relation between man and God. God's being flows through man's being. This is what she should finally offer to God.

In order to be able to offer her being to God, the following deepening dimension is required and imperatively initiated to:

Leave the awareness of your being unclothed of all thoughts about its attributes, and your mind quite empty of all particular details relating to your being or that of any other creature. (P.C.p. 156)

In order to achieve this, the novice should not be occupied with the attributes of her being. Thoughts about her own or any other's being do not bring her closer to perfection. Those thoughts should be left alone. Meditations do not yield anything at this moment.

Again: do not meditate upon your qualities. A blind awareness of your being, no specific awareness, but a general awareness of your being, conceived in an undivided heart, will meet your present need. Stimulate growth and bring not only you but all mankind closer to perfection. When you are saved, all humanity is saved. Here the author appeals to trust: '*believe me, it far surpasses the value of any particular thought, no matter how sublime*' (P.C. p. 156). Here the author promises his novice that this blind general awareness of her own being will not only bring herself but also all mankind closer to perfection and it also surpasses the value of any particular thought, idea, or invention, no matter how ingeniously smart or sublime. It exceeds everything, including all rational ingenuity.

Reflection: the counsel has shed a light on the internal struggles and conflicts to set oneself free from self-directedness and the desiring undisciplined faculties which demand material or worldly satisfaction. This work, which the author speaks of, exceeds all this and it demands to offer or dedicate one's undivided naked awareness of one's naked being to God. This implies a divine relation between man's being and God's being. God's being flows through man's being, which is God's being. This is what the novice should offer finally to God: her whole being.

3.5 Chapter 4

As a theologian the author bases his counsel on the Holy Bible and sound logic:

All this you can verify with the authority of the Scriptures, the example of Christ, and the scrutiny of sound logic. (P.C. p. 157)

The author continually refers to the authority of the Bible, which is the Holy Spirit, to Jesus Christ who should be followed as the humanly living example of God for mankind and her own sound logic as a healthy common realistic sense. Man is gifted with reason and this makes him capable of understanding the Scriptures and Jesus, though in a mystical sense.

Now the novice knows how to rely on the three authorities mentioned above, the author can refer to Genesis²⁶⁹ in relation to Jesus Christ to show his novice the way to salvation and redemption:

*As all men were lost in Adam when he fell from the love which made him one with God, so all those, who, by fidelity to their own path in life, manifest their desire for salvation, will receive salvation through the Passion of Christ alone.*²⁷⁰

In the first sentence a reference can be made to his previous remark in chapter 3: *you and all mankind*.²⁷¹ Not only Adam was lost but all men were lost in Adam, adding: when he fell from the love which made him one with God. Men were lost when they fell from the love that made them one with God. As stated in the previous chapter, man has been gifted by nature and Grace from his creation, - i.e. by the gift of being - from his very beginning God is related to mankind. Adam broke his bond with God by having himself deceived by desire. 'And as in Adam all men die, in Christ all men shall be quickened'.²⁷²

The author shifts from the Old Testament to the New Testament to show that salvation is not only meant for a few but for all, since Christ did not sacrifice himself for one or some particular persons, but for everyone, all mankind. Here the author explicitly includes himself and his novice to show how they stand together in this contemplative relationship.

²⁶⁹ Genesis 3:22-24, 6:5-6

²⁷⁰ I Corinthians 15:22

²⁷¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 157

²⁷² 1 Corinthians 15:22

The author emphasises the vital importance of self-sacrifice for the good of all, who are brothers and sisters in the natural sense, or brothers and sisters brought together by Grace, by God (as their father).

The reason for the above-mentioned issue is being taught by illustrating the distinction between the spirit and the flesh, though the spirit being the superior one since:

For the spirit is of greater dignity than the flesh and thus it is of greater value to unite the spirit to God (who is its life) by the sublime food of love than to unite the flesh to the spirit (which is its life) by the food of earth. (P.C. p. 157)

The spirit is the life of the flesh and God is the life of the spirit. The distinction being made is between which and who, both being life of the spirit.

The spirit, which is the first fruit, is the ultimate means of unity with God. If only the body is fed, you have not done everything. You have to nourish the spirit; a strong, robust spirit will not only merit salvation or redemption but it will also “reach its full perfection” (P.C. p. 157). “Its” full perfection refers to ‘the Spirit itself’. Here the novice does not hear or see any other reference than the spirit itself.

‘Inner freedom can be achieved by the combination of Grace and personal effort. Man should not remain indecisive: either we choose for the difficult path of freedom or we sink deeper and deeper in sin’.²⁷³ The author does not literally oppose the material to the spiritual dimensions, but mankind should be restored to wholeness, health and freedom. Though the author does not often discuss physical bodily issues during prayers or meditation, he dedicates his work to the use of the spirit and the will. To have a proper, righteous attitude for prayer and meditation is a sign of a pure intention. The author summons to attention. However, before man pays attention there has to be the pure intention. So, when attention has arisen, meditations take place when the intention is present.

According to Robert Llewelyn man does two things: “first man expresses her desire for God and secondly man offers God the opportunity to fulfil this desire”²⁷⁴ Both the active and the passive dimension between man and God can be detected here.

Reflection: the author has shown his authority within the Christian tradition by verifying his statements based on the three witnesses: the Scriptures, the

²⁷³ Cooper, A. *The Cloud of Unknowing, Reflections on selected texts*, 1991, p. 160

²⁷⁴ Llewelyn, R. ‘The Greatest Revelation is Stillness’, 10, in: *With Pity not with Blame, Reflections on the Writings of Julian of Norwich and on The Cloud of Unknowing*, London, Darton, Longma and Todd, 1984, p. 88

example of Christ and the scrutiny of sound logic. This authoritative verification shows a professional reliability of the counsel to the novice who can convince herself of the theological evidence of the truth of the counsel. However, the counsel heads for more by showing that Jesus Christ has done more: He has shown that no greater sacrifice can be delivered to God than the sacrifice of her very self for the good of all. Here, the vertical dimension touches the horizontal social dimension of being a Christian: the greatest offer is to offer her self for the good of all mankind.

It is in the spiritual union between the spirit and God in which the Spirit will find ultimate perfection.

The author has also shown that all those who, like Adam, broke their union with God by having themselves deceived will be faced with the possibility that salvation can only be received through the Passion of Christ. Not otherwise.

3.6 Chapter 5

Now, the author directly confronts his novice with the fact that she has reached a crucial, new stage. In the dialogue the monk makes his reader emphatically aware of having reached the point of leaving meditation behind in her growth to perfection.

Time has come to continually abide in the deep centre of the spirit. As the counselling is a circular process the author continually instructs, grasps back and continues to lead the novice deeper and further into the spiritual mystical process which goes beyond the personal aspects:

*You have reached a point where your further growth in perfection demands that you do not feed your mind with meditations on the multiple aspects of your being.*²⁷⁵ (P.C. p. 158)

Again, the author shows the novice that meditations on the various aspects of being are not necessary, since from now on they cannot contribute to the spiritual contemplative progress anymore:

In the past, these pious meditations helped you to understand something of God. They fed your interior affection with a sweet and delightful attraction of him and spiritual things, and filled your mind with a certain spiritual wisdom. (P.C. p. 158)

Pious, spiritual meditations helped to understand something of God and they influenced the inner affection so that one started to feel attracted to God and spiritual matters. The meditations filled the mind with a certain spiritual wisdom. Until so far they have been helpful in contributing to a certain spiritual wisdom, up to a certain level. The choice of the word ‘certain’ indicates something particular, a finite wisdom. These meditations have supported her understanding of God to a certain level, but now she should remain in the deep centre of the spirit, which is called the “first of the fruits” in Proverbs.

But now it is important that you seriously concentrate on the effort to abide continually in the deep centre of your spirit, offering to God that naked blind awareness of your being which I call your first fruits. (P.C. p. 158)

The novice should seriously concentrate to remain constantly in the deep centre of the spirit and even go one step further: offering to God that naked blind awareness of her being, which is called ‘the first fruits’. Here the novice is challenged to linger continually in the deep centre of the spirit waiting to be transformed into the Divine Spirit, to remain until Grace will

²⁷⁵ Proverbs 3:9-10

unite the deep centre of her spirit with God's Spirit, since this cannot be done without the help of God's Grace.

For this work no research into one's qualities of being or attributes of God's being is required. In fact: man shows God's very presence in this act of Divine Will. Here, a reference to St Augustine is appropriate: 'That I did not want what I had wanted but that I wanted what you wanted'.²⁷⁶ That which God wanted was to reveal one's own free will, in accordance with God's Will.

Inquiries into details of God's and man's existence are not necessary, since there is no other articulation of God's eternity than '*Is*':

For there is no name, no experience, and no insight so akin to the everlastingness of God than what you can possess, perceive, and actually experience in the blind loving awareness of this word, is. (P.C. p. 158)

According to the author the everlastingness of God can only be expressed by the word '*Is*', in thus denoting the being of God, He challenges his novice to find other expressions or descriptions to define God so that she becomes aware of the fact that God *Is*:

Describe him as you will: good, fair Lord, sweet, merciful, righteous, wise, all-knowing, strong one, almighty, as knowledge, wisdom, might, strength, love, or charity, and you will find them all hidden and contained in this little word, is. God in his very existence is each and all of these (P.C. p. 158)

According to the author all God's characteristics are assembled in the word '*Is*'. There is nothing that goes beyond the one word '*Is*'. All these names used for God, all indicate that God *is*. In all these expressions the word '*is*' is present.

There seems to be no difference between hundreds of ways or no way at all to increase the significance of that one word '*is*'. Discursive thoughts or ideas and the active use of the fantasy are considered a waste of time and energy and even an obstacle for spiritual growth. Based on these arguments the author continues his statement that man should be blind in her awareness of God's being as well as her own.

The novice is instructed to continue in contemplation and forget the detailed inquiry into God's being or into her own being. The novice should invest all the energy in worshipping God with all her being without any judgments since God is the being of Himself and of man's:

²⁷⁶ Augustine, A. *Confessions Book IX*, I, 1 "He praiseth God's goodness; and acknowledgeth his own wretchedness". Translated by William Watts, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1912, 2000

Let your faculties rest from their minute inquiry into the attributes of his being or yours. Leave all this behind and worship him with your substance: all that you are, just as you are, offered to all that he is, just as he is. For your God is the glorious being of himself and you, in the naked starkness of his being. (P.C. p. 159)

Here, a reference to II Peter 1:4 is made by the author, stating that:

And thus you will bind everything together, and in a wonderful way, worship God with himself because that which you are you have from him and it is he, himself.²⁷⁷

The novice should assemble everything, her complete self, and worship God *in a wonderful way* with God's own Self since that which man is, he has from God, and it is He, God *Himself*. All what man is, he has from God. In and through man, God presents himself. Man's awareness will be completely filled by God's awareness, if he leaves all behind.

However, there is a difference between God and man. According to the author man had a beginning when God created him from nothing. This beginning can be understood as 'existence'. Everything exists in God. Therefore, man's being has always been and will always be in God. Or even stronger: man's being *is* God.

Man is created and bestowed with eternal awareness by nature and Grace. Man's awareness and man's being, which belong to God's being, *is eternal*:

Of course, you had a beginning - that moment in time when he created you from nothing - yet your being has been and shall always be in him, from eternity to eternity, for he is eternal. (P.C. p. 159)

The author expresses the apparent paradox "*from eternity to eternity*". Though, 'eternity' is an 'absolute' term to label infinity or everlastingness. It can be understood as a kind of superlative, there is no beginning or ending.

Based on the above-mentioned arguments the author instructs the novice to act as follows:

And therefore, I will continue to cry out this one thing:

*Worship God with your substance
and help all mankind with your first fruits,
Then shall your barns be filled with abundance.²⁷⁸ (P.C. p. 159)*

²⁷⁷ II Peter 1:4

²⁷⁸ Proverbs 3:9-10

The novice should not only learn and listen but also act according to the author's commandments. Here again both the horizontal and the vertical dimension in the work meet in the author's counsel. One should not only worship God with her whole being, but also serve mankind with her whole being, which is the first of her fruits. If one acts accordingly he will be abundantly rewarded. The novice will thus be rewarded:

The promise contained in these last words is that your interior affection will be filled with an abundance of love and practical goodness arising out of your life in God, who is your ground of being and your singleness of heart. (P.C. p. 159)

The reward will contain an abundance of love and practical goodness arising out of her life in God. God is the ground, the fundament of her being and her singleness of heart. The heart will be undivided, one dimensionally directed onto God. No hesitations, one is not directed onto the self, but completely, inwardly and outwardly, directed onto God. Here the author reveals his promise of having the monk-reader yielding her self-awareness towards God's awareness. Moreover, the expression can also be interpreted as: God, who is your singleness of heart. The undivided heart is God's.

The author continues his metaphorical counsel relating the Old Testament's Proverbs to his counsel and he promises the novice:

And your presses shall run over with wine. These presses are your interior spiritual faculties. Formerly you forced and constrained them in all kinds of meditations and rational inquiry in an effort to gain some spiritual understanding of God and yourself, of his attributes and yours. But now they are filled and overflow with wine. This wine the Holy Scripture speaks of is accurately and mystically understood to be that spiritual wisdom distilled in the deep contemplation and high savouring of the transcendent God. (P.C. p. 159)

The metaphor used in Proverbs is being quoted by the author to illustrate the hard efforts the novice used to make by meditation and rational inquiry into one's attributes or characteristics to achieve some spiritual understanding of God and the self. By using the word "some" the author illustrates "to a certain extent", not a complete understanding of the self or of God. But now one's being will be overflowed with spiritual wisdom distilled/conserved/clarified in a deep contemplation of God, who is transcendent, clear.

This process of contemplation enters spontaneously, easily and through the working of God's Grace:

*And how spontaneously, joyously, and effortlessly shall all this happen through the working of Grace. Busy toil of yours is no longer necessary, for in the power of this gentle, blind contemplative work, angels will bring you wisdom. Indeed, the angels' knowledge is specially directed to this service as a handmaid to her lady.*²⁷⁹ (P.C. p. 159)

The author shows his metaphor in a promise consisting of the spiritual and divine wisdom which will flow over spontaneously, joyously and effortlessly, like the presses that will be run over with wine. Hard labour has become superfluous since angels will bring wisdom. Here the author shows how angels bring wisdom to mankind. The author shows how powerful this loving contemplation takes place. The angels (Seraphim, Cherubim) who are the intermediates between God and mankind, know how to serve man with divine wisdom, like the handmaids who know how to serve their lady, who is wisdom herself, since they know what the lady desires. Like Mary who was waiting to receive God's wisdom through the presence of Jesus Christ.

Contemplation containing spiritual knowledge is being served to man by angels so that man knows what God desires.

In short, in this chapter the turning point from active searching to contemplation has been described to lead the novice further into the divine realms of God. Man's being has been transcended into God's being in man: all that one is comes from God and it is God himself.

²⁷⁹ Psalm 123.2

3.7 Chapter 6

In the previous chapter the author has shown that God is the ground of man's being and how spiritual wisdom in contemplation spontaneously arises in man. It is a promise and therefore worthwhile to continue this practice. In this chapter the author shows a "meta reflection" by going back and forward to show how this practice will help the novice to open herself to God. He articulates the mystical process emphasizing that the very nature of this practice enables one to open oneself to God.

As already stated in the previous chapter it is not only an external practice; its very nature is contemplative and it is the contemplative nature which makes one receptive to the transcendent God, enabling him to lovingly descend into man's spirit. In this way man's spirit becomes more and more united and bound to God with a growing spiritual knowledge:

By its very nature, this practice makes one open to the high wisdom of the transcendent God, lovingly descending into the depths of a man's spirit, uniting and binding him to God in delicate, spiritual knowledge. (P.C. p. 160)

Here, the author accounts for this practice to show where it leads to: the unity of man attaching to God in spiritual knowledge. When man is open to the very nature of this practice, to contemplation, realizing the unity between him and God, man has gained contemplative wisdom, which is a gift. The author qualifies this as a joyful, exquisite experience. Therefore he refers to the wise man in Proverbs, whom he refers to in order to illustrate and praise this contemplative wisdom:

*In great praise of this joyful, exquisite activity the wise man, Solomon, bursts out and says: Happy the man who finds wisdom and who gains understanding.*²⁸⁰ (P.C. p. 160)

The author gives his own interpretation; he explains the hidden meaning of the words in Proverbs, saying that the one who finds wisdom is happy indeed, since this wisdom makes him whole and ready to be bound to God. Those who offer to God their blind awareness of their own being enrich their interior life with:

*a loving, delicate, spiritual knowledge that far transcends all the knowledge of natural or acquired genius.*²⁸¹ (P.C. p. 160)

²⁸⁰ Proverbs 3:13-21, Job 28:12-15, 27

²⁸¹ Proverbs 3:14

The author integrates his own teaching with the words of Proverbs by explanatory illustrations, such as:

Happy, indeed, is that man who finds the wisdom which makes him whole and binds him to God. (P.C. p. 160)

Here, ‘wholeness’ is a fundamental condition to bind oneself to God. It is wisdom which makes man full and complete and it is wisdom which binds him to God. Wisdom is found, as it has revealed itself. Wisdom is a gracious divine gift, by which man comes to understanding. Understanding and wisdom seem to be granted, revealed. Wisdom can be found, discovered, while understanding is to be gained. What is wisdom? Wisdom is a divine gracious gift; understanding is a human rational capability of reasoning, enriched by divine Wisdom.²⁸² Both wisdom and reason carry a divine dimension. The author elaborates his quotes by adding:

Happy is he, who, by offering to God the blind awareness of his being, enriches his interior life with a loving, delicate, spiritual knowledge that far transcends all the knowledge of natural or acquired genius. (P.C. p. 160)

If man offers to God the blind awareness of his own being, which is his inner deepest self, “*his interior life*” will be filled with a “*loving, delicate, spiritual knowledge*” that exceeds all knowledge whether natural or acquired by genius. Since:

*Far better this wisdom and ease in this delicate, refined interior work than the gain of gold or silver.*²⁸³ (P.C. p. 160)

“This wisdom” as a divine quality which makes man “whole” is far better than the knowledge of the senses, symbolized by gold and silver, which lie beneath us or within us, or is even similar to us. Our natural faculties do not concentrate further than on the attributes of God’s being or the being of creatures or on our own selves. The author continues his quotations of Solomon’s sayings in Proverbs to show that this interior work is preferable beyond anything else since it is the first of man’s fruit.

The author ensures the novice to prefer the highest spiritual wisdom to sensitive or rational knowledge. Contemplation is the first and the purest of man’s fruit. This is hardly surprising if we consider that the high spiritual wisdom gained through contemplation arises spontaneously from the deepest point of the spirit. It is a wisdom, dark and amorphous, but far removed from all fantasy, reasoning or imagination. Fantasies are delusions compared to this high spiritual wisdom in which man experiences that he Is.

²⁸² Proverbs 3:13 - 26, Job 28:1-28

²⁸³ Proverbs 3:14

The author states that it is quite obvious that wisdom springs up spontaneously in this work, be it beyond imagination or fantasies of reason, which cannot be produced or even reached for by any natural faculty since it is a divine quality given by God:

And little wonder, when you realise that the high spiritual wisdom gained in this work freely and spontaneously bursts up from the deepest inner ground of his spirit. It is a wisdom, dark and formless, but far removed from all the fantasies of reason or imagination. Never will the straining and toil of the natural faculties be able to produce its like. (P.C .p. 161)

The author considers it obvious that this wisdom goes beyond fantasy of reason or any imagination. The author has added the adjective ‘spiritual’ to this wisdom and he argues that this spiritual wisdom spontaneously and freely bursts up from the deepest inner ground of her spirit, which is God, since God is the ground of being. He uses metaphors for this dark and formless wisdom to show its distance from all fantasies, reasonings, imagination or even from the truth:

For what they produce, be it ever so sublime or subtle, when compared to this wisdom, is little more than the sham emptiness of illusion. It is as distant from the truth, visible in the radiance of the spiritual sun, as the darkness of moonbeams in a winter's night is from the splendour of the sun on the clearest day of high summer. (P.C. p. 161)

Compared to this wisdom, there is not much more than the “sham emptiness of illusion”, in other words: the natural faculties produce anything that is not what it appears to be, something false, fake, or fictitious that purports to be genuine.

The author refers to Proverbs relating his counsel to the Holy Bible. He does so to show that this work perfectly fulfils all the commandments and laws of the Old and New Testament as a whole.

The author states that love is the fundament of everything. He argues that contemplation is rooted and grounded in the glorious gift of love which fulfils the law. He states that this interior work is called a law, since it includes the entire law and the fullness of the law is love:

This interior work is called a law simply because it includes in itself all the branches and fruits of the entire law. For if you examine it wisely, you will find that its vitality is rooted and grounded in the glorious gift of love which is, as the Apostle teaches, the perfection of the whole law “The fullness of the law is love”. (P.C. p. 161)

According to the author this interior work of contemplation is all inclusive since it is rooted in love: the fullness of the law is love.²⁸⁴ It is divine love which completes the law, since it is love that transcends her awareness of being into the divine awareness of God's being.

The keyword here is “love”. The author promises his novice that if she keeps to this law of love she will find life for the soul interiorly and radiate this love with her whole personality exteriorly. Again: both dimensions, both the vertical and the horizontal, come together.

Therefore, the author argues that if the novice keeps “this law of love and this life-giving counsel, it really will be your spirit's life”, both interiorly and exteriorly:

I tell you, that if you keep this law of love and this life-giving counsel, it really will be your spirit's life, as Solomon says. Interiorly, you will know the repose of abiding in God's love. Exteriorly, your whole personality will radiate the beauty of his love, for with unfailing truth, it will inspire you with the most appropriate response in all your dealings with your fellow Christians. On these two activities (the interior love for God and the outward expression of your love in relating to others) depends the whole law and the prophets, as the Scriptures say. (P.C. p. 161)

The interior love for God and the outward expression of love in relation to others are being emphasised as the most important activities on which the whole law and the prophets depend, based on the Scripture. A theological foundation has been explicitly given to state that the complete law and the prophets depend on these activities; the interior love for God and the outward expression of it in relation to others. Here, again the author comes to the cross centre of the divine loving relationship between God and man which transcends the horizontal interpersonal relationships between fellow human beings.

As a conclusion to this chapter 6 the author instructs the novice to remain firm and act thus in order to transcend and become perfect in this work:

*Then as you become perfect in the work of love, both within and without, you will go on your way securely grounded in Grace (your guide in this spiritual journey), lovingly offering your blind, naked being to the glorious being of your God. Though they are distinct in nature, Grace has made them one.*²⁸⁵ (P.C. p. 161)

As a conclusion it may be stated that Christian life is more a matter of being than of doing, since man is to offer his naked being to the glorious being of God. God's being is man's being. Both beings become one

²⁸⁴ Romans 13:10

²⁸⁵ Matthew 22:40

through Grace, not through action, contemplatively knowing unknowingly. It is Love, God's Love for us and for our fellow human beings in and before God. This adds real value to our doings. 'In one way or other, everybody leads a mixed life, both contemplatively and actively'.²⁸⁶

In this chapter the novice has learned how this practice leads step by step to the joyous spontaneous spiritual wisdom in contemplation. Moreover the author stresses that 'it is love which fulfils the law'.²⁸⁷ This statement includes in itself everything, like Jesus Christ who stated that he had come to fulfil the law²⁸⁸ in which the Old and New Testament are fulfilled. Contemplation fulfils the law grounded in Love.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Clark, J.P.H. 'The Cloud of Unknowing XII', in: Szarmach, P. E.: *An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1984, pp. 275-276

²⁸⁷ Romans 13:10

²⁸⁸ Matthew 5:17-20

²⁸⁹ Romans 13:10

3.8 Chapter 7

In this chapter the author adds a new dimension to his Privy Counsel: the discernment of spirits. The contemplative process may be full of distractions or traps and therefore the author is going to deal with them by discerning the spirits. As far as “the discernment of spirits” is concerned the author reassures the novice that, as soon as this spiritual contemplative work has become a spiritual habit, she will not be easily hindered by the distracting natural faculties. To ensure the novice of this trusting confidence he tells her to rely on Proverbs:

*And the foot of your love shall not stumble.*²⁹⁰ (P.C. p. 162)

The author reassures the novice that, as soon as it has become a habit, he will not be easily distracted from this interior work, by trivialities or the insatiable seeking of the natural faculties, since in this contemplative work this way of seeking is totally rejected. The human liability of falsehood has poisoned the naked awareness of her blind being and drawn oneself from the respectful dignity of this work. In order to get rid of these distractions the author stimulates the novice to stand firm in this work.

However, the author does not argue that this contemplative work should draw someone away from her own daily activities, since in her daily activities her attention is focused on the blind awareness of her naked being:

*As I have already explained to you, this simple work is not a rival to your daily activities. For with your attention centred on the blind awareness of your naked being united to God's, you will go about your daily rounds, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, going and coming, speaking and listening, lying down and rising up, standing and kneeling, running and riding, working and resting.*²⁹¹ *In the midst of it all, you will be offering to God continually each day the most precious gift you can make. This work will be at the heart of everything you do, whether active or contemplative.*²⁹² (P.C. p. 163)

The novice's state of living should not influence her unified being with God. Whether one is actively or passively conscious of being, God does not make any difference, as long as one is present in God and keeps her attention centred on the blind awareness of her naked being united to God's

²⁹⁰ Proverbs 3: 23 and 26

²⁹¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 162-163

²⁹² Hodgson, Ph., *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises*, 1982, pp. 147-148

being. This is an adequate way of dealing with the discernment of spirits. Stand firm.

The author quotes Proverbs to explain more of the contemplative work which should not be disturbed by the noisy false word. He stimulates the novice to stand firm in this work even though this will not be understood by “the evil one”:

Moreover, Solomon also says in this passage that if you sleep in this blind contemplation, far from all the noise and agitation of the evil one, the false world, and the frail flesh, you shall fear neither peril nor any deceit of the fiend. For without doubt, when the evil one discovers you at work, he will be utterly confused, and blinded by an agonizing, ignorance of what you are doing, he will be driven by mad curiosity to find out. But never mind, for you shall graciously take your rest in the loving union of your spirit with God's. (P.C. p. 163)

The noise is used as a metaphor for everything which disturbs the rest in the loving union of one's spirit with God's Spirit. If man sleeps in this blind contemplation the soul is far removed from evil.

The author promises that if the novice-reader will stand firm, she will find rest in ‘the loving union of your spirit with God's’, which is called “sleep in blind contemplation”.²⁹³ The author promises his novice that if she stands firm, both body and spirit will be renewed, realizing that it is only by the mercy of Jesus that the novice should achieve this:

*Your sleep shall be untroubled; yes, for it shall bring deep spiritual strength and nourishment to renew both your body and your spirit.*²⁹⁴ *Solomon confirms this shortly after when he says, it is complete healing for the flesh.*²⁹⁵ (P.C. p. 163)

In the next paragraph the author continues his counsel by quoting Proverbs not to fear although the enemy should be taken seriously into account. As an example to follow the author supports the novice by quoting the “wise man”:

*Be not afraid of the sudden terror or of the power of the wicked... Here the wise man says: “Do not be overcome with anxious dread if the evil one comes (as he will) with sudden fierceness, knocking and hammering on the walls of your house; or if he should stir some of his mighty agents to rise suddenly and attack you without warning”.*²⁹⁶ *Let us be clear about this: the fiend must be taken into account.* (P.C. p. 163)

²⁹³ Proverbs 3: 24

²⁹⁴ Proverbs 3:8

²⁹⁵ Proverbs 3:8 and 4:22

²⁹⁶ Proverbs 3:25

A very important step in the discernment of spirits is to take “The evil one”, into account. The evil one is the wicked one, the one who hates this spiritual work, who will come and try to distract the novice from her work. The evil one, the devil, the wicked malicious one, and his “mighty agents”, which personify the natural faculties, will certainly attack. The author is severe in his message: “let us be clear about this: the fiend must be taken into account”. (P.C. p. 163) The author takes this evil fiend seriously, but he does not consider him unconquerable. It is clear to the author that the enemy, or the evil one, the devil, will do his utmost to distract one from this work.

Anyone beginning this work (I do not care who he is) is liable to feel, smell, taste, or hear some surprising effects concocted by this enemy in one or other of his senses. So do not be astonished if it happens. There is nothing he will not try in order to drag you down from the heights of such valuable work. (P.C. p. 164)

The author explicitly addresses all whom it concerns by saying: “*anyone beginning this work (I do not care who he is)*”. (P.C. p. 164) All those who begin this work will likely experience hostile effects in their senses and he calls them ‘*astonishing, surprising effects, which will be painful*’. (P.C. p. 164) However, he comforts the novice’s thoughts that she should not be surprised if it happens, since the enemy will do everything to drag one down from the valuable work. Here the metaphorical qualifications “*dragging down*” and the “*height of such valuable work*” are being opposed to each other to stress the contrast between what is downwardly wrong and what is just highly valuable. The author warns and protects his novice at the same time to make her aware of what can happen: “*So do not be astonished if it happens*”. If she realises that it won’t be a surprise when she will be deceived, then she will become more and more awake and alert in the discerning of the spirits. In this work in which it is crucial to have a sharp sense of the discernment of spirits the novice must rely on God’s love since God is always on her side. God will protect the novice and He will be near, ready to help:

He will keep your foot... The foot he speaks of here is the love by which you mount up to God, and he promises that God will protect you so that you are not overcome by the wiles and deceits of your enemies. These, of course, are the fiend along with his cohorts, the false world and the flesh. (P.C. p. 164)

First the author has quoted Proverbs: “*He will keep your foot*” and explains this metaphor by translating “foot” into “the love by which you mount up to God”. Now the novice should rely on the divine protection against the

distractions of the enemies, the fiend with his cohorts, the false world and the flesh, the seductions. The foot is love, the fundament.

As a conclusion to this chapter, the author addresses his novice as his friend:

*See, my friend! Our mighty Lord, he who is love, he who is full of wisdom and power, he himself will guard, defend, and succour all who utterly forsake concern for themselves and place their love and trust in him.*²⁹⁷ (P.C. p. 164)

God protects those who leave their concerns for themselves and keep focused and centred relying on Him. The author tells the novice not to worry about her self, concerning her being, but to rely on God who is her deepest self being. This is the “place” to come to the most pure discernment of spirits.

The author changes his opposite lecturing position toward a more fraternal or maternal position. In other words: his position seems to shift from a vertical hierarchical to a more horizontal maternal or fraternal position.

In short: this chapter has dealt with the discernment of spirits, a task which is likely to be fulfilled by those who go into the process of contemplation. In this chapter the novice is taught how to recognize the evil one, revealing itself as noise, the false world and the weak flesh. The “evil” will be at a loss, since the novice will graciously take her rest in the loving union of her spirit with God’s spirit.

²⁹⁷ Proverbs 4:22 b, Cloud Author, A Pistle of Preier, 51/11 – 12, in: Hodgson Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises* pp 101 - 107

3.9 Chapter 8

As it seems incomprehensible that anyone can utterly forsake concern for himself/herself and place his or her love and trust in God, the novice is driven to the edge of despair:

But where shall we find a person so wholeheartedly committed and firmly rooted in the faith, so sincerely gentle and true, having made self, as it were, nothing and so delightfully nourished and guided by our Lord's love?²⁹⁸ Where shall we find a loving person, rich with a transcendent experience and understanding of the Lord's omnipotence, His unfathomable wisdom and radiant goodness; one who understands so well the unity of his essential presence in all things and the oneness of all things in him that he surrenders his entire being to him, in him, and by his Grace, certain that unless he does he will never be perfectly gentle and sincere in his effort to make self as nothing? (P.C. p. 165)

These desperate objections are met by a summary of requirements for perfection. A perfect person like this will be deeply drenched in God's love in the final loss of self. A person like this will rest untroubled for his own well-being. So, why should the novice not want to be like the example set here above? It is an expression of an ultimate desire to rest untroubled for her wellbeing in all daily worries, work and other activities.

To strengthen his rhetoric the author shows anger towards the above described human objections, which he opposes fiercely by naming those who object as "half-hearted folk". The text suggests the presence of a greater audience, since he calls his addressees by "half-hearted folk" "yourselves". This again includes evidence that the author wants to reach all those who are willing to experience the Privy Counseling. Those who object because of their doubts and unbelief, receive a reprimand:

Keep your human objections to yourselves, you half-hearted folk! (P.C. p. 165)

Everyone should be satisfied with his own calling in life, which will bring him to salvation. The ones who doubt should respect those who dare forsake themselves. The ones who doubt should leave the contemplatives alone since what these contemplatives do exceeds rational comprehension. At the same time the author puts those who doubt at ease by the words: "so do not be shocked or surprised by their words and deeds". (P.C. p. 165) What they, the contemplatives, do goes beyond rational comprehension of those who do not believe.

²⁹⁸ Genesis 41: 38 – 40

The author in his counsel is very expressive and closely related to his reader, showing an apparent anger, as if the author loses his patience towards his novice(s) and raises his tone in a vocative:

Oh for shame! How long must you go on hearing or reading of all this without believing and accepting it? I refer to all our fathers wrote and spoke about in times past, to that which is the fruit and flower of the Scriptures. (P.C. p. 165)

The author shows impatience and annoyance to those who do not believe or realise the “fruit and flower of the Scriptures” either by their blindness which blocks their understanding or by their jealousy towards others who might receive this great good. The author warns those to watch out for the enemy who wants them to rely more on their own reason than on the ancient wisdom of the true fathers, the power of Grace, and the designs of God. One should rely more on the ancient wisdom of ‘the true fathers’, the power of Grace and the designs of God than on his own reasoning, since reasoning is finite and “dies” as soon as contemplation is “born”:

How often have you not read or heard in the holy, wise, and reliable writings of the fathers that as soon Benjamin was born, his mother, Rachel, died.²⁹⁹ Here Benjamin represents contemplation and Rachel represents reason. When one is touched by the Grace of authentic contemplation (as he surely is in the noble resolve to make self as nothing, and the high desire that God be all), there is a sense in which we can really say that reason dies. (P.C. p. 166)

The author is severe in his teaching and he repeats his explanation that when one is touched by the Grace of authentic, genuine contemplation one senses that reason dies. The author shows his astonishment concerning the inability to believe this. Here he addresses the ones who have often heard and read the works of well-educated men. Here he addresses scholars, theologians, since they were the ones reading the Holy Scriptures in his time and still incapable of believing:

But have you not often heard and read all this in the works of various holy and scholarly men? What makes you so slow to believe it? And if you do believe it, how dare you let your prying intellect rummage among the words and deeds of Benjamin? Now Benjamin is a figure of all who have been snatched beyond their senses in an ecstasy of love, and of them the prophet says: “There is Benjamin, a young child, in excess of mind.” (P.C. p. 166)

The author challenges the scholars, the theologians, those who use their intellectual skills to theoretically read and study the words and deeds of

²⁹⁹ Genesis 35:18

Benjamin, but who are unwilling to rely on the ancient wisdom. Benjamin represents all those who have exceeded their senses in an ecstasy of love. Contemplation exceeds the reason and senses in ultimate wisdom. The author warns the scholars and rational intellectuals not to destroy the power, the wisdom and the designs of God. Here he compares their destructive actions to the mothers who killed their new born children, as described in the New Testament:

I warn you: be vigilant lest you imitate those wretched human mothers who slew their newly born children. Watch, lest you accidentally thrust your bold spear with all your might at the power, wisdom, and designs of the Lord. I know you want only to further his plans; yet, if you are not careful, you may mistakenly destroy them in the blindness of your inexperience. (P.C. p. 166)

This chapter has been a dialectical rhetorical disquisition to convince those who doubt and it is meant to strengthen their reliance on contemplation even though they are incapable of understanding or grasping what contemplatives do. Moreover, this chapter has also functioned as a warning to the “half-hearted folk”³⁰⁰ to save the wholehearted contemplative beings and not extinguish them in the blindness of their half-hearted inexperience.

³⁰⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 165

3.10 Chapter 9

In this chapter, the author goes back into the history of the Christian Church to show that this counselling is embedded in a long history and that both the author and his reader stand in a long tradition concerning this work of contemplation:

In the early Church, when persecution was common, all sorts of people (not especially prepared by pious, devotional practices) were so marvellously and suddenly touched by Grace that without further recourse to reason they ran to die with the martyrs.In our times the Church is left in peace, but is it hard to believe that God still can and may touch all sorts of people with the Grace of contemplative prayer in the same wonderful and unforeseen way?God will unfailingly protect those who, absorbed in the business of his love, have forgotten concern for themselves. Yet, is it surprising that they are so wonderfully secure? No, for truth and gentleness have made them fearless and strong in love. (P.C. p. 166)

The people mentioned did not concern for themselves and they fearlessly showed their love for God. In the 13th and 14th century the Church is left in peace, but this does not mean that God does not touch people with the Grace of contemplative prayer in the same miraculous and surprising way as in the early times. The author shows his novice that they stand together in an infinite contemplative tradition by referring to the past, to the present and also to the future. To make this clear he states that this did not only happen in the past, it may and can happen in these times as well.

The author is convinced that God can still touch all kinds of people with the Grace of contemplative prayer in the same wonderful and unforeseen, surprising way as in the early times. It should be kept in mind that God is the one who chooses, not man.

A point being made here is: that people surrender their will, their very own being, to God's will and God's being. Then people realise God's truth and experience His gentleness and this is what makes them so secure.

The author helps the novice understand those who criticise contemplatives by offering possible explanations, e.g.: “either the evil one has robbed his heart of the loving confidence he owes to God and the spirit of good will he owes to his fellow Christians”. (P.C. p.167) The critical person fails in both dimensions; in the relation with God and in the relation with his fellow Christians. Another possible explanation for the scared critic might be that he “or else he is not yet sufficiently steeped in gentleness and truth to be a real contemplative”. (P.C. p. 167) The last explanation includes a hopeful

development which might be taken into account. The latter conclusion leaves room for the critical person who founds his judgments on fear of surrendering themselves to God. However, the novice should not be afraid, since the author directly puts him at ease:

You, however, must not be afraid to commit yourself in radical dependence upon God or to abandon yourself to sleep in the blind contemplation of God as he is, far from the uproar of the wicked world, the deceitful fiend, and the weak flesh. Our Lord shall be at your side ready to help you; He will guard your step so that you be not taken. (P.C. p. 167)

The author protects his novice and promises her that she must not be afraid to abandon herself to sleep in the blind contemplation of God. God will guard the novice; He will guard her step so that she be not taken by e.g. “the wicked world”.³⁰¹

The author explains his reference for “sleep”:

It is not without reason that I liken this work to sleep. Similarly, in this spiritual sleep, those restless spiritual faculties, Imagination and Reason, are securely bound and utterly emptied,³⁰² while the whole inner man is wonderfully nourished and renewed. (P.C. p. 167)

In the spiritual sleep, the restless spiritual faculties, imagination and reason, are bound and completely emptied while the body is being renewed. Both body and spirit find rest. The author considers both body and mind important for one’s rest. As a conclusion the author explains why it is so important to control one’s faculties in order to create room for contemplation.

He does not only tell his novice what to do, but he also considers the reason why important. The novice has to become capable of having a complete understanding of the reasons why she should act thus, not only obeying her spiritual master, but also drawing her own conclusions and taking her own responsibilities. He wants the novice to see why he instructs her all thus:

Do you see now why I tell you to bind up your faculties by refusing to work with them and be absorbed, instead, in offering to God the naked, blind awareness of your own being? (P.C. p. 167)

Here the author views his counsel from a distance and he evaluates his teachings explicitly with his novice by saying: do you see now why I tell you this? The novice gets an insight in his motives why she should act thus. It is clear that the author is in a direct narrative communication with his

³⁰¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 167

³⁰² Proverbs 3.24

novice. The author stresses the importance of controlling her faculties by refusing to work with them or being absorbed by them:

*You might be inclined to clothe it in ideas about the dignity and goodness of your being or with endless considerations of the intricate details relating to man's nature or the nature of other creatures. But as soon as you do this, you have given meat to your faculties and they will have the strength and opportunity to lead you on to all sorts of other things. I warn you, before you will find yourself distracted and bewildered. Please be wary of this trap, I pray you.*³⁰³ (P.C. p. 167)

Here lies an interesting parallel between the busy distracting toil of Martha and the warning of the author that one will find the self-distracted and bewildered in endless considerations. In the Gospel by Luke Mary's and Martha's attitudes toward God are being compared: Mary sitting at Jesus's feet, while listening to his words and Martha working and taking responsibility for the household. Martha protests against Mary's attitude, but Jesus replied: you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed — or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.³⁰⁴

The author has theologically accounted for his work by supplying church historical evidence stating that he and his readers stand in a long tradition of contemplation.

Moreover, his counsel finds itself in a dialectical relation between those who go after contemplation and those who doubt and dare not rely on God. He has compared this work of contemplation to sleep, since in sleep the natural faculties stop working and the body takes rest to renew itself. In the spiritual sleep imagination and reason are being emptied to leave room for contemplation.

³⁰³ Luke 10.41

³⁰⁴ Luke 10.41

3.11 Chapter 10

On the one hand the author emphasises one's intellectual expertise, but on the other hand he emphasises its limitations. In this chapter he answers the questions arising from an intellectual, inquisitive, rational, proud mind by reassuring his novice of the shortcomings of such a mind. However, the author does understand this dilemma since until now the novice has been dependent on her faculties, which have brought her so far, so:

Actually, this is not surprising. For in the past, you have been so dependent upon them that you will not easily put them aside now, even though the contemplative work requires that you do. (P.C. p. 168)

The author refutes objections and at the same time clarifies the dialectical struggle so that the novice feels more and more convinced of the eternal value of the work.

Until now the faculties have supported mental, emotional and personal growth and now they should be put aside. This seems quite incomprehensible, since these faculties have built up her characteristic self, in the way she is, what and who she is, however they have not given the existential experiential insight *that she is*. Therefore the author is going to lead the novice into the experiential existential insight of being.

It is clear that *The Book of Privy Counseling* is meant to be read and understood as a real counsel, a dialogue in which two persons observe each other; the author shows a reaction in his counsel towards the novice, who seems to wonder whether God would be pleased with this work and if so, for what reason:

At the moment, however, I see that your heart is troubled and wondering about all this. Is it really as pleasing to God as I say? And if so, why? (P.C. p. 168)

Here the author clearly shows understanding, he tunes in on his reader's state of being. he stands next to her, supporting her to win her struggle and to conquer her doubts, distractions and confusions.

To discern the spirits the author warns the novice that she should realise that the questions and doubts arise from a rational inquisitive mind. The rational mind will not find peace when the novice is going to consent to this work in case its curiosity has been stilled by a rational explanation only.

Being a scholar himself the author recognises that if this is the case he is going to take the challenge to meet the inquisitive demands of the novice.

But since this is the case, I will not refuse. I will yield to your proud intellect, descending to the level of your present understanding, that afterward you may rise to mine, trusting my counsel and setting no bounds to your docility. (P.C. p. 168)

Stressing the fact that the reader will trust her counsel and set no limits to her docility the author calls upon the wisdom of St Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁰⁵

I call upon the wisdom of St. Bernard, who says that perfect docility sets no bounds. See, how I desire to win your confidence! Yes, I really do, and I shall. But it is love that moves me, rather than any personal ability, degree of knowledge, depth of understanding, or proficiency in contemplation itself. At any rate, I trust this is so, and pray God to supply where I fail, for my knowledge is only partial whereas his is complete. (P.C. p. 168)

The communication between the author and the novice becomes more and more a loving communion in which the author prays to God to help when he lacks or fails in his counsel with his novice. It is a spiritual counsel in which the author, driven by love, guides his novice in her mystical and spiritual development. Love is the centre of Privy Counsel.

The author has challenged his novice to give up her faculties even though these faculties have built up her characteristic self. This characteristic self is how one is, what and who one is. However these faculties have not given the existential experiential insight *that one is*. Therefore the author is going to lead the novice into the experiential existential insight of being by offering her the way to contemplation.

As a spiritual guide, the author is driven by love. The author longs to share with his novice the experience of the dynamic centre from which everything arises.

³⁰⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 168

3.12 Chapter 11

In this chapter the author tries to express the inexpressible. In this attempt he sets his own spiritual way as an example for the novice to get a feeling of the inexpressible. The author labels the inexpressible as ‘it’:

Whatever we may say of it, is not it, but only about it. (P.C. p. 169)

The author argues that scholars would not know how to deal with the wisdom of a contemplative if this contemplative would be able to express her experiences, since human knowledge would turn out to be completely inadequate. These contemplative experiences could never fit within the limited boundaries of human language. Here the author shows the impossible and incongruent communication between rational scholars and contemplatives.

The author even considers it not done to make an attempt to match human logic to contemplative wisdom. He even prays to God to withhold him from ever desiring to “want that”:

Now to satisfy your proud intellect I will sing the praises of this work. Believe me, if a contemplative had the tongue and the language to express what he experiences, all the scholars in Christendom would be struck dumb before this wisdom....Yes, for by comparison the entire compendium of human knowledge would appear as sheer ignorance. Do not be surprised, then, if my awkward, human tongue fails to explain its value adequately. And God forbid that the experience itself become so degenerate as to fit into the narrow confines of human language. No, it is not possible and certainly will never happen; and God forbid that I should ever want that! (P.C. p. 169)

According to the author, the actual reason for his writing at this time is to try to describe to the confusion of the novice’s proud intellect that it is impossible to say what it is. It is only possible to say something about it.

For purposes of analyses it is possible to speak of knowledge and love in contemplation: but the activity the author speaks of, is a blend of both, a completely simple experience arising in the depth of the contemplative heart: in the last analysis it is indescribable, as the author declares when he says that:

Whatever we may say of it is not it, but only about it. (P.C. p 168)

As ‘it’ is inexplicable, the author asks a rhetorical question to his novice:

Let me begin by asking you a question. Tell me, what is the substance of man’s ultimate, human perfection and what are the fruits of this

perfection? I will answer for you. Man's highest perfection is union with God in consummate love, a destiny so high, so pure in itself, and so far beyond human thought that it cannot be known or imagined as it really is. Yet wherever we find its fruits, we may safely assume that it abounds. Therefore, in declaring the dignity of the contemplative work above all others, we must first distinguish the fruits of man's ultimate perfection. (P.C. p. 169)

These fruits are the virtues. A perfect person should be abundantly virtuous. All the virtues are clearly and completely contained in contemplation itself, not influenced by any selfish intent or egocentric interest. It is not important to weigh separate virtues, since:

I will mention no particular virtue here for it is not necessary and besides, you have read them in my other books. It will suffice to say that the contemplative work, when it is authentic, is that reverent love, that ripe, harvested fruit of a man's heart which I told you in my little Letter of Prayer.³⁰⁶ It is the Cloud of Unknowing, the secret love planted deep in an undivided heart, the Ark of the Covenant. It is Denis' mystical theology what he calls his wisdom and his treasure, his luminous darkness, and his unknown knowing. It is what leads you to a silence beyond thought and words and what makes your prayer simple and brief. And it is what teaches you to forsake and repudiate all that is false in the world. (P.C. p. 169/170)

The author considers it sufficient to say that contemplative work, when it is authentic, genuine, is the secret love planted deep in an undivided heart. A heart which is one, not twisted or divided but straightforward. He refers to his own other works, *Letter of Prayer* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, but he also refers to Denis' *mystical theology*. He confirms his authorship of the two mentioned works and he refers to the theological work of Denis in a way which confirms that he was a scholar himself. He refers to Denis' theology in which Dionysius calls it 'his wisdom and his treasure, his luminous darkness, and his unknown knowing'. (P.C. p. 170) Mind the contradictory expression 'luminous (light) darkness' and 'unknowing knowing'. These contradictory terms refer to a characteristic problem within mystical literature. The author describes it as: "It is what leads you to a silence beyond thought and words" (P.C. p. 170) and it is what teaches you to forsake everything which is false in the world. Authenticity is the most important virtue here.

The author shows the novice to forsake her very self, according to the Gospel's demand to deny oneself if one wishes to come after Christ. However this will only happen "if he first calls us and leads us there by Grace". (P.C. p. 170) If someone wants to come after Him, he should first

³⁰⁶ Hodgson, Ph. *The Cloud of Unknowing and related treatises*, 1982, p. 101

deny himself, carry his cross and follow Him. One can only come after Him by Grace:

But even more, it is what teaches you to forsake and repudiate your very self, according to the Gospel's command: "Let anyone who wishes to come after me deny himself, carry his cross and follow me".³⁰⁷ In these words he teaches us that we may follow him to the mount of perfection as it is experienced in contemplation, only if he first calls us and leads us there by Grace. (P.C. p. 170)

Grace is higher than human nature, so one can follow him to perfection as it is experienced in contemplation, however, we can only do so if He first calls and leads us there by Grace. The author warns the novice and all those who may read this, that God's Grace is the first basic condition for doing this work of contemplation, since God is the chief worker in contemplation:

This is the absolute truth. And I want you (and others like you who may read this) to understand one thing very clearly. Although I have encouraged you to set out in the contemplative way with simplicity and boldness, nevertheless I am certain, without doubt or fear or error, that Almighty God himself, independently of all techniques, must always be the chief worker in contemplation. It is he who must always awaken this gift in you by his Grace. (P.C. p. 170)

However, the reader's passive receptive consent is in fact an active attitude, since she continually opens herself to God's action by a "singleness of your desire to reaching up to God". (P.C. p. 171) This contradictory attitude of both passivity and activity is a striking characteristic of this work of *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

Yet the passive consent and endurance you bring to this work is really a distinctively active attitude; for by the singleness of your desire ever reaching up to your Lord, you continually open yourself to his action. (P.C. p. 171)

Until now the author has been rather concrete in his counsel, his teachings and his instructions. Now he cannot show concrete steps anymore but he reassures his novice that she will learn through experience and insight of spiritual wisdom:

All this, however, you will learn for yourself through experience and the insight of spiritual wisdom. (P.C. p. 171)

Not everyone will be touched in the same way, directly or indirectly or even through the author himself or through the instrumentality of this book. Here the novice can be stirred and find spiritual counsel through the author

³⁰⁷ Matthew 16: 24

and even through the book, which might be an instrument of God. So the author can only teach and instruct as follows:

But since God in his goodness stirs and touches different people in different ways (some through secondary causes and others directly), who dares to say that he may not be touching you and others like you through the instrumentality of this book. I do not deserve to be his servant, yet in his mysterious designs, he may work through me if he so wishes, for he is free to do as he likes. (P.C. p. 171)

It is God who determines how people are touched and moved through secondary means, (such as reading the Scriptures, hearing about divine matters, or reading this counsel) or directly and immediately. The author surrenders himself to God in his counsel and he emphasises his unworthiness to be God's servant. Still, God may work through the author and through the counsel if He desires. It is important to realise that not only the novice but also the author is surrendered to God's mercy. No one has any power or influence unless it is granted by God.

The author attempts to explain the incongruent communications between rational scholars and contemplatives who try to express the inexpressible. Contemplation is inexpressible. However, the author shows the possibility to lead someone into the inexpressible contemplative wisdom by continually challenging and motivating and interrogating the novice to think, feel and hear about it even though it is not *it*. The novice knows, like the monk knows, but it is so inexpressible that they can only talk about it. Still the counsel keeps moving onwards to a contemplative understanding which will be reached by concentrating on the virtues that create the opportunities to come to contemplation, to love, to wisdom, a treasure, luminous darkness, the unknown knowing, a silence beyond thought and words. To reach contemplation one must make the self completely receptive, consenting and suffering his divine action in the depths of his spirit.

In the counsel both the author and the novice depend on God's mercy and the author has shown his complete dependence on God who may work through the author to support and guide the novice.

3.13 Chapter 12

The author begins this chapter with the contrasting conjunction ‘But’ to introduce the reversal change from leaving everything behind except the blind awareness of one’s being to yield this blind awareness to the awareness of God as one’s being. In the previous chapters the author has guided and supported the novice, step by step, to come to the awareness of her naked being and now the author has come to guide his novice to a turning point and take the second step: to forget even this awareness of her naked being to be conscious only of the being of God. In this way the author leads the novice to a total self-forgetfulness, a seemingly total loss of self for a consciousness only of the being of God.³⁰⁸

In his reflection, the author reveals his intention to guide the novice to the ultimate experience of God as her being:

It was with an eye to this ultimate experience that I said in the beginning: God is your being. At that time I felt it was premature to expect you to rise suddenly to a high spiritual awareness of God’s being. So I let you climb toward it by degrees, teaching you first to gnaw away on the naked, blind awareness of yourself until by spiritual perseverance you acquitted an ease in this interior work. (P.C. p. 171)

The author describes and summarizes his counselling process and support the novice to come to a naked blind awareness of the self until the novice has become an “expert” who easily carries out this interior work. The author seems reassured and self-reliant about his work since he “knew” that he would prepare his novice to experience “the sublime knowledge of God’s being” in a “vivid reaction” on the novice in the dialogue:

I knew it would prepare you to experience the sublime knowledge of God’s being. And ultimately, in this work, that must be your single abiding desire: the longing to experience only God. (P.C. p. 171)

The author reflects on the spiritual process as far as it has developed until now within this counselling process. This reflection gives the novice insight into her own spiritual process. Moreover, this reflection is also a way of digesting and absorbing the counsel in all its aspects. The counsel becomes more and more life itself in which all is transformed and newly clothed in the experience of God:

It is true that in the beginning I told you to cover and clothe the awareness of your God with the awareness of yourself, but only because you were still spiritually awkward and crude. With perseverance in this practice, I

³⁰⁸ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 10

expected you to grow increasingly refined in singleness of heart, until you were ready to strip, spoil, and utterly unclothe your self awareness of everything, even the elemental awareness of your own being, so that you might be newly clothed in the gracious stark experience of God as he is in himself.³⁰⁹ (P.C p. 172)

The author shows his own nature as the lover who has completely despoiled himself because of the one he loves. It is love which moves the author and his counsel! To make it more concrete he states that it is not a temporary rage or fashion. It is eternal:

And this is not a passing fancy. No, he desires always and forever to remain unclothed in full and final self-forgetting. This is love's labour; yet, only he who experiences it will really understand. This is the meaning of our Lord's words: "Anyone who wishes to love me let him forsake himself." It is as if he were to say: "A man must despoil himself of his very self if he sincerely desires to be clothed in me, for I am the full flowing garment of eternal and unending love".³¹⁰ (P.C. p. 172)

This reflection supplies the novice with a new insight into her own spiritual process. It is also a way of assimilating the counsel with her life in all its aspects. The counsel presents itself more and more as Life itself in which all is transformed and newly clothed in the experience of God.

³⁰⁹ Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 4:22-24

³¹⁰ Matthew 16:24

3.14 Chapter 13

Chapter 12 has initiated the second step: to reject all thought and feeling of one's own being to be conscious only of the being of God in a total self-forgetfulness, a seemingly total loss of self for a consciousness only of the being of God.³¹¹

However, man falls back now and then in self-directed experiences. Then, if the novice realises that she experiences her self and not God in this work, she should feel pity and she should forget and disregard herself as Jesus and as God demands. Since this is of such fundamental importance: to transform from self-perception to God's perception. The author becomes severe and direct in his tone using imperatives to make the novice do as what is being told. From the counsel's view there is too much at stake and it is an important discernment between natural human perspective and spiritual divine perspective:

And so, when in this work you become aware that you are perceiving and experiencing self and not God, be filled with sincere sorrow and long with all your heart to be entirely absorbed in the experience of God alone. (P.C. p. 172)

In the previous chapters the author tells the novice to be, since it is of fundamental importance to experience God's love as fully as possible in this life. It is a transformation of her being to God's being:

Yet do not misunderstand my words. I did not say that you must desire to un-be, for that is madness and blasphemy against God. I said that you must desire to lose the knowledge and experience of self. This is essential if you are to experience God's love as fully as possible in this life. You must realise and experience for yourself that unless you lose self you will never reach your goal. For wherever you are, in whatever you do, or howsoever you try, that elemental sense of your blind being will remain between you and your God. (P.C. p. 173)

First the novice was told to clear away all details about the self and now she has to clear away everything between the self-being and God's being. However, the elemental sense of one's blind being will remain between God and the self. At certain times God may intervene and fill one with a transient experience of God self, however at other times the naked awareness of her own being will be a barrier between her and her God. These moments make her realise the burden of the self. The author expresses the hope for the novice that in that time Jesus may help her since the novice will need Him strongly:

³¹¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 10

It is possible, of course, that God may intervene at times and fill you with a transient experience of himself. Yet outside these moments this naked awareness of your blind being will continually weigh you down and be as a barrier between you and your God... It is then that you will realise how heavy and painful the burden of self is. May Jesus help you in that hour, for you will have great need of him. (P.C. p. 173)

The author speaks about the painful cross of self, referring to the words: “*Let a man first take up his cross*” and afterwards “*follow me into glory to the mount of perfection*”.³¹² According to the author it is necessary to bear the cross of self since this is the only way to prepare oneself for the transcendent experience of God as he is and for union with him in consummate love:

And now as this Grace Touches and calls you may you see and appreciate more and more the surpassing worth of the contemplative work. (P.C. p. 173)

Seeing and appreciating the surpassing value of contemplation is a process; that one may more and more see and appreciate contemplation. It is more than getting used to it; one comes more and more to see the real value of contemplation which may be too much for man to fully grasp, see and appreciate it.

In this chapter the author assumes that the novice has managed to be unclothed of her self-awareness of her own being so that she may be clothed in the experience of God as He is in himself. This is a true transformation from self-experience to God’s experience, losing the knowledge and experience of self to experience God’s love as completely as possible in this life.

³¹² Matthew 16:24

3.15 Chapter 14

Now, time has come that the novice-reader should realise the convincing truth of the counsel. Therefore the author asks the rhetorical question:

Tell me now; do you still expect your faculties to help you reach contemplation?

It is so obvious that it is impossible to reach contemplation by ingenious speculations that this question sounds superfluous. If one would answer in the affirmative then he has not understood the counsel. And still, the author continuous, realizing that the novice will still be liable to fall back into error. This counsel is full of patience and as it remains in its everlasting spiral structure it will endlessly go on with its counselling, stepping forward, backward, resting in itself, and exceeding all.

The author concluded the previous chapter with the statement that the contemplative work surpasses everything else. If Grace touches and calls someone there may be a growing appreciation of the ever exceeding value of contemplation. Now the author challenges the novice to consider whether any faculty will help to reach contemplation:

Imaginative and speculative meditations, by themselves, will never bring you to contemplative love. Be they ever so unusual, subtle, lovely, or deep; be they of your sinful past, the Passion of Christ, the joys of our Lady, or the saints and angels in heaven: or of the qualities, subtleties, and states of your being, or God's, they are useless in contemplative prayer. For myself, I choose to have nothing except that naked, blind sense of myself which I spoke of earlier. (P.C. p. 174)

The author again stresses the fact that nothing brings one to contemplation except the naked blind awareness of the self. If the novice still expects the faculties to be of support she will discover that they will not. The author makes a side step to clarify the difference between the self and the activities. He states that people confuse their deeds with themselves. The actor is one thing and the deeds are another. Being is one thing and doing is another. This is the same concerning God: God is as He is in himself which is different from his works. It is important to realise that God's works are not God himself:

Notice that I said of myself and not of my activities. Many people confuse their activities with themselves, believing them to be the same. But this is not so. The doer is one thing and his deeds are another. Likewise, God as he is in himself is quite distinct from his works which are something else again. (P.C. p 174)

The author is very careful in his formulation concerning the sequence of his counsel; after he has taken his sidestep he explicitly says that he goes back to his point. He also wants to make clear that he desires to experience God as He really is, not only His works:

But returning to my point, the simple awareness of my being is all I desire, even though it must bring with it the painful burden of self and make my heart break with weeping because I experience only self and not God. I prefer it with its pain to all the subtle or unusual thoughts and ideas man may speak of or find in books for this suffering will set me on fire with the loving desire to experience God as he really is. (P.C. p. 174)

The author shows a contradictory longing for desiring the simple awareness of his being which will be a painful burden at the same time especially when he will experience only his own self then and not God. But, still he will prefer this to all the ideas found in books. He interacts with his novice, noticing the novice's sophisticated and clever mind, which gives the impression that this novice is (expected to be) a student, or a scholar as well, however less advanced than the author who is the spiritual leader and counsellor. Again, the author articulates his own experience to make clear that his sufferings set him on fire with the loving desire to experience God as He really is, not only His works.

However, the author acknowledges the importance of meditations and prayers since it will bring just converted sinners to come to the spiritual awareness of the self and God. A beginning sinner should first exercise his reason in appreciating his human potential and the works of God. One should consider whether he is able to do this work and one should have learned to regret sin and enjoy goodness:

All the same, these sweet meditations do have their place and value. A newly converted sinner just beginning to pray will find in them the surest way to the spiritual awareness of himself and God. Moreover, outside God's special intervention, I believe it is humanly impossible for a sinner to come to peaceful repose in the spiritual experience of himself and of God until he has first exercised his imagination and reason in appreciating his own human potential, as well as the manifold works of God, and until he has learned to grieve over sin and find his joy in goodness. (P.C. p. 174)

In the following part the author makes clear that everyone can go astray and many make the mistake of believing they have already entered the spiritual door of contemplation while they are still outside. Here again, it is Christ who graciously lets people in as God.³¹³ The Lord Jesus Christ in his humanity, is the porter:

³¹³ John 10:7-9

Believe me; whoever will not journey by this path will go astray. He must remain outside contemplation, occupied in discursive mediation, even though he would prefer to enter into the contemplative repose beyond them. Many mistakenly believe that they have passed within the spiritual door when, in reality, they are still outside it. What is more, they shall remain outside until they learn to seek the door in humble love. Some find the door and enter within sooner than others, not because they possess a special admittance or unusual merit, but simply because the porter chooses to let them in. (P.C. p. 174)

‘In your deepest, interior being called by the unexpected personal ‘touch’ of the divine spirit of God, you may lovingly lift up you blind naked being to the glorious Being of God. Try to touch God only with your loving desire and let him touch you by Himself, through his being. This happens surprisingly unexpectedly and powerfully, without any exercise and effort from your side. Indeed, the mystical experience arises in your being from God’s divine being. So, you will worship God with his own being and you will be lovingly united with Him in love. Contemplation is not an act out of one’s own will, but one will be touched by the loving contemplation and be thrown into ecstasy beyond the workings of the rational faculties. God is the first initiator and he takes the initiative. We will be touched, stirred and moved.³¹⁴

In short: the rhetoric question at the beginning of this chapter is so appealing that no one dares to reply ‘yes’: *Tell me now, do you still expect your faculties to help you reach contemplation?* The author makes this question sound superfluous so that the novice realises that it is even unreasonable to expect that contemplation can be reached by genius talents. And still, the author continuous, realizing that the novice will still be liable to fall back into rationalities or inquisitions.

As already stated: it is love that moves this counsel and therefore it patiently remains in its everlasting spiral structure. It will endlessly go on with its counselling stepping forward, backward, laying to rest itself in God, finally exceeding all.

³¹⁴ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introduction’ *Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*, 1984, p. 9

3.16 Chapter 15

Referring to the previous part of the counsel in which the author calls the Lord the porter, the Lord admits entrance to those, whom he has chosen to enter. The author now bursts out of joy praising the “household of the spirit” as “a delightful place of which the Lord himself is not only the porter, but also the door”. In the previous chapter he has made it clear how inexplicable his encounter with the Holy Spirit is and therefore he speaks in a metaphorical way to describe how Christ, the Lord, functions:

And oh, what a delightful place is this household of the spirit! Here the Lord himself is not only the porter but the door.³¹⁵ As God, he is the porter; as man, he is the door. (P.C. p. 175)

Here the author shows how the unity of Christ humanity with a sensory love transforms into a divine love for his divinity. “We cannot come to Christ unless he admits us to come to him, in his humanity.” (P.C. p. 175)

And thus in the Gospel he says:

*I am the door of the sheepfold
he that enters by me shall be saved.
He shall go in and go out
and find pastures.³¹⁶
He that enters not through the door
but climbs up another way
the same is a thief and a robber.³¹⁷*

According to John’s gospel Jesus says that He is the door and those who enter by Him will be saved. Here the author invokes the bible in which Christ says that He is both the porter and the door; the porter through His divinity and the door through his humanity. In connection to this he refers to John 10:1 that everyone entering in any other way is a thief or robber. There is no other way to Christian perfection and contemplation than through conformation to Christ in his humanity, passion and virtues.

Jesus Christ positioned himself as the porter who determined who might enter and how. However, He chose to create a common clear way to everyone who wanted to come in. God has clothed Himself in human nature and offers His complete availability so that no one can say that (s)he did not know the way. Jesus told the people that He is the door and

³¹⁵ John 10:9

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ John 10:1

everyone who comes through Him shall be safe. Everybody can come in through Him.

The author tells his novice, but also others who may hear and read his counsel, how to prepare her to be granted entrance through the door:

Those who wish to enter by the door should begin by meditating on the Passion of Christ³¹⁸ and learn to be sorry for their personal sins, which caused that Passion. Whether he goes in, contemplating the love and goodness of the Godhead, or goes out, meditating on the sufferings of his humanity, he shall find the spiritual pastures of devotion in abundance. Yes, and should he advance no further in this life, he will have plenty of devotion, and more than plenty, to nourish the health of his spirit and bring him to salvation. (P.C. p. 175)

The author shows the way to come to the door: first meditate on the Passion of Christ and learn to be sorry for personal sins which contributed to that Passion. Jesus Christ took all man's sins up to His cross and therefore: be compassionate for Jesus. He suffered for the sins of mankind, while mankind did not suffer for its own sins. The author instructs to lift up the heart to receive love and goodness of God who descended in human mankind. Anyone who does as such will be safe. It does not really matter whether one goes in, contemplating the love and goodness of God, or if one goes out meditating on the sufferings of humanity. Even if one does not make advances in this life, she will have enough to nourish her spirit and be saved. It is clear that everyone should realise his vulnerability and sinful humanity. Only through humanity one will be redeemed.

The author shows a suitable structure in his counsel which should be strictly followed in order to come to salvation. He is strict in his teaching, since if one tries alternative ways of entering through the door he is considered a thief, a criminal:

Yet some will refuse to enter through this door, thinking to reach perfection by other ways. They will try to get past the door with all sorts of clever speculations, indulging their unbridled and undisciplined faculties in strange, exotic fantasies, scorning the common, open entry I spoke of before and the reliable guidance of a spiritual father as well. Such a person (and I care not who he is) is not only a night thief but a day prowler. (P.C. p. 175)

The author uses the metaphors 'a night thief' and a 'day prowler' to show two different ways of life in which people go astray. A night thief is someone who is a sinner, in darkness, someone who relies on her own personal insights and rejects sound advice and the path described by the

³¹⁸ John 10:9

monk. A day prowler is someone who shows a virtuous life and acts as if he leads a genuine spiritual life on the surface, superficially, acting as if he is a real contemplative, but deeply inside not bearing any fruit of that contemplative life.

The author keeps emphasizing the fundamental importance of following the clear path of Christian life as described above. He illustrates this by an example of a young man who feels inclined towards union with God, while he has merely yielded to his own desires instead of taking part in a spiritual counsel. This is a dangerous way, according to the author, since he seems to follow his own path instead of the one which lies embedded in Christian tradition. The author describes a person who is ambitious and reaching high beyond himself, outside the ordinary, clear path of Christian life:

*Occasionally, too, this young man may feel a slight inclination toward union with God, and blinded by this take it as approval of what he does. In reality, by yielding to his unruly desires and refusing counsel, he is on the most perilous course possible. Even greater his peril, when he is full of ambition for things high above himself and well outside the ordinary, clear path of the Christian life. This path I have already explained in the light of Christ's words, when I showed you the place and necessity of meditation. I called it the door of devotion, and I assure you it is the safest entry to contemplation in this life.*³¹⁹ (P.C. p. 176)

In short:

The author expresses his own exaltation by announcing how delightful the place of the household of the Holy Spirit is, of which Christ is the porter as God and the door as man.

In this part of the counsel the core of attention lies on the tension between those who want to enter in their contemplation on the passion of Christ and willingly regret their sinfulness which caused the Passion of the Christ and those who want to enter by sharp analyses and smart speculative imagination. The first are genuinely concerned and involved and they may enter, while the second run the risk of going after their own greedy desires, exceeding the self. The one-folded way of the Christian, which is the door of devotion, opens “the safest entry to contemplation in this life”. (P.C. p. 176)

Ambitions arising from the self, do not comply with the Christian path which is recognizable to the spiritual fathers and to the author, who is the representative of this *Book of Privy Counseling*, guiding the novice through this mystical process. The author is severe in his warning towards those

³¹⁹ John 10:1

who rely more on their own personal insights than on sound advice or ‘the security of the common, clear path’ (P.C. p. 176) he described.

3.17 Chapter 16

In this part the author relates to the novice's disposition, or mood to feel the novice's awareness of her state of being, since it is fundamental to realise whether one should enter contemplation or wait until she recognises the secret divine invitation to enter. Therefore, in this context of recognition of the required disposition, the author rhetorically asks his novice what she would do at the threshold of contemplation. The author does so to test her pure awareness of it.

The author is addressing his novice again in an open, general sense which draws the reader further into the process of opening and moving along with the process: when someone is standing at the door, knowing that Christ is the door, she should wait and not go in until her conscience and her spiritual guide have come to the conclusion that the spirit is ready, clean, without rust. However, the most important thing is that she should learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding and stirring her deeply in the heart. This is a secret invitation from God's spirit. The awareness of God's spirit guiding, stirring and beckoning in the depths of one's heart is the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing someone to a higher life of Grace in contemplation. It is God's Grace, not human performance or achievement.

As far as the essential core of the discernment of spirits is concerned, it can be stated: learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding you secretly in the depths of your heart and wait until the Spirit itself stirs and attracts your soul within and you within. This shows how subtle this movement is, provided it is a movement. This secret invitation is so very delicate, subtle and clear that one "knows" whether it comes from God's Spirit or not and since it comes from God's Spirit it is the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing someone to a higher life of Grace in contemplation. Though, it is not the highest life of Grace.

To illustrate and teach the novice how to discern the spirits, the author goes on taking his novice along with him in the process by showing examples of those who read or hear about contemplation and consequently feel increasingly intimately united to God, even in this life already. This is a promising prospect, which the novice should be heading for and focus her attention to.

Still, the author emphasises that Grace is the most important moving factor touching the contemplative, since others who may read or hear the same will remain quite unmoved. For them it is better to stay and wait patiently at the door for they are called to salvation but not yet to perfection. The

author emphasises the importance of the distinction between salvation and perfection:

For it will happen that a man reads or hears about contemplation and increasingly feels in his ordinary devotions a gently mounting desire to be more intimately united to God, even in this life, through the spiritual work he has read or heard about. Certainly, this indicates that Grace is touching him, because others will hear or read of the same thing and be quite unmoved, experiencing no special desire for it in their daily devotions. These folk do well to go on standing patiently at the door, as those called to salvation but not yet to its perfection. (P.C. p. 177)

People who are moved and feel a desire to be more united to God in this life do the right thing to wait patiently at the door as they will be saved, but they may be called to their perfection in due course.

Therefore the author does not hesitate to warn the novice(s) not to discuss God's affairs, in other words: one should not interfere into God's decisions concerning whom He stirs and calls and whom He does not. It is not important whether one feels called to salvation or to perfection. It is important that one attends to his/her own calling and not discuss God's designs in the lives of others. If one dares to judge she will fall into error:

Do not meddle in his affairs: whom he stirs and calls and whom he does not; when he calls, whether early or late; or why he calls one and not another. Believe me, if you begin judging this and that about other people you fall into error. Pay attention to what I say and try to grasp its importance. ...Let him alone. He is powerful, wise, and full of desire to do the best for you and for all who love him. (P.C. p 177 and 178)

If God calls, one should respond perfectly to his Grace, if God does not call, humbly pray that he will when the time is right. This is a consoling message since if God has not called one now, He will probably do so later. It is important that He is loved by those who feel involved in these matters. Here the author shows man's own responsibility in this divine loving relationship. Here man as God's image is being at stake here: God wants man to transfer into a divine image.

The counsel is clearly not meant to be only a monologue; the text shows an interactive relationship by words, such as: 'Yes' to show agreement and affirmation.

The author considers it of ultimate importance for the novice to be at peace at her own calling, whether waiting outside in meditation or within by contemplation. Both callings are precious; however the second calling of contemplation is the better:

Be at peace in your own calling. Whether you wait outside in meditation or come within by contemplation, you have no cause to complain; both are precious. The first is good and necessary for everyone, though the second is better. Lay hold of it, then, if you can; or rather I should say, if Grace lays hold of you and if you hear our Lord's call. Yes, I speak more truly when I say this. For left to ourselves, we may proudly strain after contemplation, only to stumble in the end. Moreover, without him, it is all so much wasted effort. Remember, he himself says: "Without me you can do nothing." (P.C. p. 178)

The author reacts on his novice by the affirmative in his dialogue 'Yes' by emphasizing 'I speak more truly when I say this'. If her actions arise out of the self she may proudly strive for contemplation and this will result in stumbling in the end. Again, he emphasises that without God one cannot do anything. First God stirs and attracts one and only then one can respond by consenting and suffering or undergo God's action. God will not be pleased by anything one does out of the self, but the contemplative work should be completely pleasing to God. In other words: the contemplative work in which one consents and suffers God's action when He stirs and attracts one is the work which should please God, not the work initiated by the person herself.

This can only be possible by giving up the blind awareness of the self to God's awareness; a transformation from man's (natural) awareness to a divine awareness.

In short: it is of vital importance to feel the exact and appropriate moment to respond to God's secret invitation to enter through the door which is Christ or just wait, even when the door has been found. It is the Holy Spirit which secretly invites one in the depths of the heart and then one should wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons from within, inside the deepest point of the human divine spirit. This is the moment when the heart knows immediately that the Holy Spirit is inside, moving and setting one into motion to enter through the door of the delightful household of the Holy Spirit.

3.18 Chapter 17

Reflecting on the previous paragraph the author explains why he has made the point concerning the issue: Who is the initiator: God or man?

I make this point on purpose to refute the ignorant presumption of certain people who insist that man is the principal worker in everything, even in contemplation. (P.C. p. 178)

The author is very explicit in arguing that not man, but God is the chief worker in everything. In contemplation it is God who is at work as the chief worker, while man moves and goes along. In other good works God is the chief worker as well, though He facilitates and supports man by means of the scripture, a trustworthy counsel and common sense. This is contrary what people may expect since they assume that God is the One moving along.

The author states that:

I want you to understand that in everything touching contemplation, the contrary is true. God alone is the chief worker here and He will act in no one who has not laid aside all exercise of his natural intellect in clever speculation. (P.C. p. 179)

In Contemplation God is the chief worker and He remains present and supporting even if one has not laid aside his/her own logical reasoning, but He will not act in them. However, it remains true that

in every other good work man acts in partnership with God, using his natural wit and knowledge to the best advantage. (P.C. p. 179)

God is the chief worker and He is fully active, not only in contemplation, but in other works as well in which He is actively present in another way consenting and assisting man through secondary means.

To clearly distinguish between God as the chief worker or one's own natural intellect which is directed towards one's own speculative interest one should keep in mind the following criteria for how to deal with the discernment of spirits:

First: the realisation that God is the chief worker, not man. Man can do nothing without God. Second: then there are three criteria or witnesses to determine whether one is on the "right track": the light of the Holy Scripture, a reliable counsel and the directives of common sense, inclusively the demands of his/her state, age and living circumstances. Third: there are two callings of Grace; the interior one and the exterior one. Fourth: two kinds of evidence for discernment whether God is the one who is calling one spiritually to contemplation: the interior and the exterior sign.

Fifth: The touches and tokens of Grace working in two ways (in their absence teaching patience and in their coming providing loving food). Finally all signs disappear which will cause a feeling of being lost and left alone being on a kind of spiritual ocean, crossing from the physical life to life in the spirit. Then severe temptations will disturb the unity. An example of a severe temptation is to pursue an inspiration without the rational examination in the light of the three “witnesses” mentioned above (P.C. p. 179). This rational examination relies on contemplative rationality, not on pure intellectual speculation. The author assures his novice to keep undividedly focused in trust or faith. One is finally tested in trust, in faith: rely on it that God will never withdraw his Grace from the ones he has chosen, except in deadly sin. One has to learn patience in absence and grow strong so that one becomes supple and pliable so that God can lead him/her to spiritual perfection and union with God’s will, who is the initiator.

The author wants to make clear to his novice that it is an ignorant presumption to argue that contemplation depends on the person who should be the initiator in everything, while God is the co-operator. He refers to certain people who hold the opinion that man is active while God passively consents. The author is of the opposite opinion that it is God who is the chief worker here who acts in people.

The author does not mean that the novice-reader should not use her natural intellect or theological insights. On the contrary: she should rationally, and spiritually, examine her inspirations in the light of the Holy Scripture, a reliable counsel and her common sense. These are three criteria, or “three witnesses”, to check whether she is on the right track: the Holy Scripture, a reliable counsel and common sense.

Thus, in all ordinary activities a man’s native wit and knowledge (governed by the light of Scripture, good counsel, and common sense) take responsible initiative, while God graciously consents and assists in all these matters belonging to the domain of human wisdom. But in all that touches contemplation, even the loftiest human wisdom must be rejected. For here God alone is the chief worker and he alone takes the initiative, while man consents and suffers his divine action.³²⁰ (P.C. p. 179)

This is the way in which the author holds the Gospel’s words which do have different meanings in the daily ordinary activities than in contemplation. He teaches his novice to determine and realise the difference:

This, then, is the way I understand the Gospel’s words: “Without me you can do nothing”. They mean one thing in all ordinary activities and quite

³²⁰ John 15:5

another in contemplation. All active works (whether pleasing to God or not) are done with God, but his part is, as it were, to consent and allow them. In the contemplative work, however, the initiative belongs to him alone, and he asks only that man consents and suffers his action. So you may take this as a general principle: We can do nothing without him; nothing good or nothing evil; nothing active or nothing contemplative. (P.C. p. 179)

Here the author dictates his general principle to his novice: one can do nothing without God. One cannot do anything good without God but one cannot do anything bad or evil either, actively or contemplatively without God. This is presented as a simple and clear rule which the novice should follow. However, the Gospel's words have different meanings in normal activities and in contemplation. In contemplation God alone is the chief worker, the sole master, Who takes the initiative, while man consents and suffers His divine action. Normal activities are done with God, whether He agrees or not, but he tolerates them. Good actions are permitted, stimulated and assisted by God. God leaves man free in depraved actions, or sins:

God leaves us so free that we may go to damnation if we choose this over sincere repentance. (P.C. p.180)

The author presents this work as simple since it is a completely straightforward orientation on God. The novice, as a contemplative, only has to consent and allow God to be the first initiator.

The author seems to consider it important to repeat the above-mentioned points again to explain them to his novice that God is always with her, whether she commits sins, or acts virtuously. God does not approve or disapprove of her deeds. He supports someone when she advances to her merit and He also supports someone in her shame if she falls back. It is not about good or evil, it is about a growing comprehension. In contemplation God takes the initiative, first to awaken someone and then to work in him/her, leading someone to perfection by spiritual union to Himself in complete love. This is a calling of Grace.

According to the author God speaks to everyone. Everyone on earth falls in one of the three categories mentioned: sinners, actives or contemplatives:

*And thus, when our Lord says: "Without me you can do nothing," he speaks to everyone since everyone on earth falls into one of these three groups: sinners, actives, or contemplatives. In sinners he is actively present, permitting them to do as they will; in actives, he is present, permitting and assisting; and in contemplatives, as sole master, awakening and leading them in this divine work.*³²¹ (P.C. p. 180)

³²¹ Corinthians 6:17

The author shows concern about the correct comprehension of his statements and therefore he has used a great variety of words to make it clear to the novice that it is important to realise when to use the faculties and when not to and also to see how God acts in one when one uses the faculties and when he does not do so. The author wants his novice to be aware of the discernment of the ways of whether and how using the faculties to gain divine wisdom instead of sheer intellectual cleverness. He wants to protect the novice against (self) deceptions.

In his reflection on what he has just been saying in so many words the author does not consider all these words particularly relevant, but since they are written he lets them stand. An interesting relation can be detected between Pilate's statement on top of the cross, applied on Jesus Christ whose accusers wanted to wipe out a text: "and since it is written, let it stand"³²² (P.C. p. 180). The relevance of the text is not particular, since the words carry a message with an overall meaning which far exceeds their concrete meaning.

Now he wants to return to the subject, which is relevant: the callings of Grace.

In short: this part of *The Book of Privy Counseling* has dealt with criteria set for the discernment of spirits with the emphasis on the realisation that God is the chief worker, not man. Man can do nothing without God. God is present in everyone, though in a different way, depending on the state of one's being either as a contemplative, as an active or as a sinner.

This chapter shows the structure of the following chapters which will also deal with the discernment of spirits. Three criteria to discern whether one is on the "right track" have been mentioned: the light of the Holy Scripture, a reliable counsel and the directives of common sense.

³²² John 19:22

3.19 Chapter 18

Tell me, please, is there one sign, or more, to help me test. (P.C. p. 180/181).

This chapter is crucial in the discernment of spirits, since here the author helps his reader to discern whether God is really calling her to a more intense life of grace or not.

Next to the three witnesses, which have been mentioned in the previous part, to determine whether one is on the “right way” and the realisation that God is the chief worker, two kinds of evidence for discerning whether or not God is calling one spiritually to contemplation will be shown. These two kinds of evidence, signs or the callings of Grace, are indicated as the interior and exterior sign.

The callings of Grace, the interior and the exterior one, show how God acts in man. The Counsel explicitly shows the interaction between the author and the novice, to illustrate how God works in the parties involved; the author on the one hand and the novice on the other hand. The distinction between both within *The Book of Privy Counseling* becomes smaller and the author and the reader become more and more one in feeling, savouring and sensing.

The author writes that he senses a question rising in the novice’s-reader’s mind concerning the discernment of spirits. The novice-reader is looking for a sign to test the meaning of the growing desire for contemplation and her enthusiasm when being involved in reading about or listening to divine matters:

Is God really calling me through them to a more intensive life of Grace such as you have described in this book, or does he give them simply as food and strength for my spirit that I may wait quietly and work on in that ordinary Grace which you call the door and common entry for all Christians? (P.C. p. 180, 181)

The author interacts with his novice in his counsel by indicating that he senses a question in the mind of the novice, however, he shows some empathetic insecurity, finding out whatever man, who is so nearby, might still doubt about. Therefore he says: “perhaps you are thinking something like this”. The author expects a question about eventual signs explaining the growing desire felt for contemplative prayer and with a delightful enthusiasm whenever he hears or reads of it. The author makes the novice seem to doubt which calling is applicable on her: is God really calling or does the novice have to wait and work on in the normal Grace as all Christians do? These are the questions the author expects his novice to ask

and now he is attempting to answer them according to his own conviction being a contemplative himself:

I will answer you as best I can.

You will notice, first of all, that I have given you two kinds of evidence for discerning whether or not God is calling you spiritually to contemplation. One was interior and the other exterior. Now it is my conviction that for discerning a call to contemplation, neither one, by itself, is sufficient proof. They must occur together, both indicating the same thing, before you may rely on them without fear of error. (P.C. p. 181)

There is a clear distinction between the interior sign and the exterior one, however, they must arise together to prove a call to contemplation. On the one hand it is vital to discern the two, on the other hand they must be experienced together. Therefore the author keeps his counsel clearly structured so that the novice gets the opportunity to make a clear distinction between the signs:

The interior sign is that growing desire for contemplation constantly intruding in your daily devotions. And there is this much I can tell you about that desire. It is a blind longing of the spirit and yet there comes with it, and lingers after it, a kind of spiritual sight which both renews the desire and increases it. (I call this desire blind; because it resembles the body's faculty of motion – as in touching or walking – which as you know does not direct itself and is, therefore, in a way, blind.) (P.C. p. 181)

The author states that the interior sign of a growing desire for contemplation continually penetrates into ones daily prayers. It is a blind longing of the spirit which finds a spiritual sight which continually feeds the desire. If the devotions are filled with the memory of her own sinfulness, considerations of Christ's Passions or anything else resembling the common Christian way of prayer the blind desire originates in the ordinary Grace, which means that God is not calling one to a more intense life of Grace yet. It is an active spiritual desire to come closer to God, but one is not called to contemplation yet. It is still a one-way action from man to God. The author states that in this case God is giving food and strength to wait quietly and work in the ordinary Grace.

The author continues to explain the second sign in the next paragraph:

The second sign is exterior and it manifests itself as a certain joyful enthusiasm welling up within you, whenever you hear or read about contemplation. I call it exterior because it originates outside you and enters your mind through the windows of your bodily senses (your eyes and ears), when you read. As for the discernment of this sign, see if that joyful enthusiasm persists, remaining with you when you have left your reading. (P.C. p. 181, 182)

The author indicates that the exterior sign is merely the common door and entry for all Christians. He calls the sign exterior because it originates outside and comes into her mind through the bodily senses. One may be joyfully enthusiastic whenever one reads or hears about contemplation, but when it disappears soon afterwards or when it does not remain in everything one does, it is not a special touch of Grace.

In short: the two callings of Grace, the interior one, a growing blind desire for contemplation and the exterior one, which originates outside and intrudes through the windows of her bodily senses. When experienced both separately they do not indicate God's stirring or calling to a more intensive contemplative life of Grace yet. Contemplation remains and pursues one in everything one does, whether one is awake or asleep, intruding in everything and capturing her desires.

The divine truth which springs from contemplation speaks profoundly and accurately of God and of the perfection of the human spirit. (P.C. p. 182)

3.20 Chapter 19

One would travel the whole world to meet a soul-mate.

However, in the meeting, one will be speechless since it is inexpressible. It is very difficult to express what one experiences and desires in the contemplative process.

In this chapter the author states that if the interior sign, which is the mounting desire for contemplation and the exterior sign, which is the joyful enthusiasm which arouses when one reads or hears of it, meet. If these two meet and unite you can rely on it that God is calling to begin a more intense life of grace.

The author states that if someone hears or reads about contemplation it will always be there in everything one does and it will intrude one in her daily devotions creating a barrier between her and the devotions. There is more to it, according to the author:

Moreover it will seem to occur simultaneously with that blind desire which, in the meantime, quietly grows in intensity. The enthusiasm and the desire will seem to be part of each other; so much so, that you will think it is only one desire you feel, though you will be at a loss to say just precisely what it is that you long for. (P.C. p. 182)

The author describes the experiences the contemplative goes through in this contemplative process; however he knows from his own experience that there is a growing difficulty expressing exactly what one is longing for in this contemplative process. Though, the author points out to the novice that her whole personality will be transformed and for the time being (in which one feels the touch) nothing will trouble her self. One will travel the whole world to meet a soul-mate but in the meeting one will be speechless, since it is inexpressible. Still, whatever others say, one wants to speak of it using perhaps only a few words, but these few words will hold “a world of wisdom” which may be completely misunderstood by those who are not able to exceed the limits of rational reason. The author puts how and what the novice will be and how she will behave into a new perspective. He expects certain behaviour and a recognizable attitude in the general sense but also in the specific sense, concerning the discernment of spirits:

Your whole personality will be transformed; your countenance will radiate an inner beauty, and for as long as you feel it nothing will sadden you. A

thousand miles would you run to speak with another who you knew really felt it, and yet when you got there, find yourself speechless. (P.C. p. 183)

Referring to the previous part the author has explained whether the interior and the exterior signs are God's call or not. The novice has to investigate this. The author continues his counsel stating that God's touch will have different effects than mentioned before.

The author summarizes the previous two chapters in the statement that the growing desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm when reading or hearing of it meet and become one. If these two signs encounter one may rely on them as proof that God is calling one to come in and start a more intense life of Grace.

Thus the mounting desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm that seizes you when you read or hear of it meet and become one. These two signs (one interior and one exterior) agree, and you may rely on them as proof that God is calling you to enter within and begin a more intense life of Grace. (P.C. p. 183)

In short: the author explains how one's personality transforms in due course when growing onward to contemplation in which the internal growing desire for contemplation and the exaltation, which grasps one when externally touched, come together and become one. Then both signs, the internal and the external, are united in one tune. Finally the author states that when the two signs concord and become one it is a proof that God is calling one to enter and start a more intense life of Grace.

Grace is being understood as the workings of God. Grace manifests itself in a dynamic in which the Holy Spirit is at work. Grace will operate in man and through man.

3.21 Chapter 20

In this chapter the author teaches the reader how to persevere in the absence of tokens of Grace and how

to keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord. (P.C. p. 184)

Grace itself cannot be experienced by or through the senses and emotions since it is so pure and spiritual, but the tokens of Grace can be experienced to great joy and at the same time be withdrawn to deepen and mature patience:

The sensible fervour they experience are the tokens of Grace, not Grace itself. These our Lord will withdraw from time to time to deepen and mature our patience. He does so for other reasons, also. (P.C. p. 185)

The author does not want his novice to consider whatever reasons God might have to withdraw the tokens of Grace.

Now, as the effects of the unity of both signs - the interior and the exterior - being assembled in one tune, have become real, the author assumes the novice to realise that everything he has written about the two signs is true. Time has come to admit that God is really calling to enter into the 'household of the Holy Spirit'³²³ and go for a more intensive life of Grace. However, he warns the novice that, despite the convincing evidence that this is true, everything may disappear, leaving one alone, bereft, lost, fallen somewhere in between, a barren situation in which one is not even able to meditate. The author ensures the novice that it will be so, but at the same time he supports his novice to hold on and not to despair and humbly and patiently suffering it since she must come to the awareness that God will do as He wishes.

The author describes the barren situation, in which the novice lingers at the moment, as a metaphorical spiritual ocean on which one travels from an attached life (of the flesh) to a detached life (in the spirit):

For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit. (P.C. p. 184)

Again, the author warns his novice-reader to expect severe troubles, by using metaphoric examples such as "great storms" but at the same time he promises his novice not to panic and he tells her to rely on God or do as best as she can, given the circumstances since he assures and promises his novice that God is not far away and perhaps touching one and leaving

³²³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 175

again. The novice should not only rely rationally or sensibly on God, but she needs to trust on God in the deepest point of the heart, knowing unknowingly, blindly aware, a deep fundamental loving trust. According to the author God does so with a wise intention, namely to make one so spiritually supple and formed to his will:

Keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord, or at any rate, do so as best you can under the circumstances. Truly, he is not far away and perhaps at any moment he will turn to you touching you more intensely than ever in the past with a quickening of the contemplative Grace. And if you will manfully suffer it all with gentle love, each coming will be more marvellous and more joyful than the last. Remember, all he does, he does with wise intent; he desires that you become as spiritually supple and shaped to his will as a fine Roan glove is to your hand. (P.C. p. 184)

The author continually uses metaphors to make his points clear, for example: God's intentions to make someone *spiritually supple and shaped to his will as a fine Roan glove is to your hand* (P.C. p. 184). The author uses this example to make it clear to his novice that God comes and goes to educate someone in the secret depths of her spirit and teach the real meaning of patience. Again, the author warns his novice not to make mistakes about this, since God may withdraw anything from those He has chosen, but He will never withdraw His Grace except in the case of deadly sin:

And so he will sometimes go and sometimes come, that by both his presence and his absence he may prepare, educate, and fashion you in the secret depths of your spirit for this work of his... For make no mistake about this; God may at times withdraw sweet emotions, joyful enthusiasm, and burning desires but he never withdraws his Grace from those he has chosen, except in the case of deadly sin. (P.C. p. 184)

The author makes the distinction between Grace, recognized by man in relation to God, and the tokens of Grace, recognized in nature and in relation to fellow human beings. Emotions, enthusiasm and desires are tokens of Grace, but they are not in themselves Grace. The tokens may be withdrawn often but God will not withdraw Grace from the ones he has chosen, except in case of deadly sin. To reassure his novice he stresses that he is certain of this. This means that the novice may be reassured that she may safely linger in God's Grace. God may withdraw the tokens to deepen and mature patience or for other reasons unknown to man, who can rely on it that it is always for the spiritual good of someone:

Of this I am certain. All the rest, emotions, enthusiasm, and desires, are not in themselves Grace, only tokens of Grace. And these he may often withdraw, sometimes to strengthen our patience, sometimes for other

reasons, but always for our spiritual good, though we may never understand. Grace, we must remember, in itself, is so high, so pure, and so spiritual that our senses and emotions are actually incapable of experiencing it. (P.C. p. 185)

In short: even though one has come to the deep realisation of the true recognition of the interior and exterior signs assembled in one tune, hardship and despair may follow if one is not able to stand firm in deep trust and faith deeply lingering in ones heart to bear the absence of everything referring to the loving union with God. The counsel has supported the novice to exercise patience and keep a loving trust in God deep in the heart, since God may withdraw the tokens of Grace, such as happy and joyful enthusiasm and burning desires, but God never withdraws his Grace. Grace itself may be impossible to be experienced, but the tokens of Grace can be experienced and if God withdraws the tokens of Grace he does so to deepen and mature man's patience or for other reasons, but always for man's spiritual good.

3.22 Chapter 21

Now the reader will experience God as He really is, stripped of all the temptations of sensible fervours or passions even though they are the ultimate joys on earth. The author has come to the point to indicate to his novice that she has come to the point of being unclothed of her self and clothed in nothing but God.

The author continues initiating the novice into the workings of God's Grace, which works in two ways: learn patience in the absence of the tokens of Grace and grow strong when they turn up until man has become so supple and pliable that God can finally lead her to:

The spiritual perfection and union with His will, which is perfect love. (P.C. p. 185)

In the previous chapter the author concluded that a careful distinction should be made between Grace itself which cannot be experienced through the senses since Grace is so pure and spiritual and the tokens of Grace, such as emotions, enthusiasm and desires which can be experienced. Therefore the author repeats his emphasis on the distinction between Grace and the tokens of Grace, since the novice will be tempted to call '*the delights of sensible fervour*' God's presence. Still, through the tokens of Grace God wants to make man subtle and patient so that he may remain in God's love and service.

As soon as man has learned how to rely on God, patiently in desolation, and how to experience the love in the tokens of Grace he:

will be as willing and content to forego all feelings of consolation, when he judges best, as to enjoy them unceasingly (P.C. p. 185)

The author encourages the novice to realise that: if someone has become so pliable that God can lead one to the spiritual perfection and union with His will, one will be as content to miss all feelings of consolation as to enjoy them continually. Then love has become perfectly pure and one will be able to see God and be spiritually united with God's love, nakedly experiencing him "at the sovereign point of the Spirit" beyond the farthest reaches of her conscious mind and her senses, where one unknowingly "knows":

Moreover, in this time of suffering your love becomes both chaste and perfect. It is then that you will see your God and your love, and being made spiritually one with his love, nakedly experience him at the sovereign point of your spirit. (P.C. p. 185)

However, this experience will be blind in this life, but if the heart is pure and undivided, one will perceive and feel that it is God, as he really is. The

author is completely sure and he wants to share this certainty to his novice to realise that the experience of God will be blind, as it should be in this life, but with the purity of an undivided heart, one will perceive and feel that it is God, as He really is, no doubt:

Here, utterly despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but him, you will experience him as he really is, stripped of all the trapping of sensible delights, though these be the sweetest and most sublime pleasures possible on earth. This experience will be blind, as it must be in this life; yet, with the purity of an undivided heart, far removed from all the illusion and error liable to mortal man, you will perceive and feel that it is unmistakable he, as he really is. (P.C. p. 186)

The author argues that the mind which experiences God as He is, is not more divided from God than from her own being, which is one in essence and nature. God is one with his being, so the spirit is one with God whom it sees and experiences, since they have become one in Grace. God is one with His own being. Man is one with God through Grace:

Finally, the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which as we know, is one in essence and nature. For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in Grace. (P.C. p. 186)

Finally, the mind which is capable of being aware, beyond her own reaches of unknowingly knowing, seeing and experiencing God as he is. This mind is as one with God as it is with itself. This mind is one with God in essence and in nature: in essence unknowingly knowing God, and in nature with itself which is in itself God, and with its fellow human beings in nature. The spirit, which is aware, which sees and experiences God, is united and one with God. God's being and human being have become one in Grace. This is a gift, offered by God.

In short: the author has encouraged the novice to realise that: if someone has become so pliable that God can lead one to the spiritual perfection and union with his will, one will be as content to miss all feelings of consolation as to enjoy them continually. Then love has become perfectly pure and one will be able to see God and be spiritually united with God's love, nakedly experiencing him "at the sovereign point of the Spirit" beyond the farthest reaches of her conscious mind and her senses, where one unknowingly knows!

The mind which experiences God as He is, is as one with God as it is with itself in essence and in nature. In essence God's being and man's being meet in the sovereign point of the spirit, in nature man has become so

pliable and subtle that man's will is in complete concordance with God's will.

Here, in this part of the counsel, the ultimate experience of spiritual oneness with God's love is expressed.

3.23 Chapter 22

See then! Here are the signs you asked for. If you have any experience of them, you will be able to test the nature and the meaning of the summons and awakening of grace. (P.C. p. 186)

To confirm and emphasise the truth of the previous chapter in which the ultimate divine experience has been expressed, the author cannot but express an exclamation, expressing recognition and mutual understanding of being on equal terms concerning this truth.

Now the author considers his reader of being able to test the truth. However, the author and reader are still not on equal terms since the author still remains the authoritative, guiding his novice onto his contemplative path.

The author argues that only few people are so singularly touched by the Grace of contemplation to have an immediate, authentic experience of all the signs together in the very beginning. This implies that more people will be touched and confirmed in the Grace of contemplation so that they have an immediate and authentic experience on the longer run. This counsel speaks of the very beginning in which only few people are touched, but there will be more in due course:

As a rule, few people are so singularly touched and confirmed in the Grace of contemplation as to have an immediate and authentic experience of all these tokens together, in the very beginning. (P.C. p. 186)

Now time has come to test. The author not only calls his novice-reader to acknowledge the receipt of this knowledge and experience, but also to test herself against the three witnesses; the criteria of the Scripture, the Spiritual father and her own conscience:

Yet, if you think you have really experienced one or two of them, test yourself against the rigorous criteria of Scripture, your spiritual father, and your own conscience. If you feel they all approve as one voice, it is time to lay aside speculative reasoning of your being or God's, of your activities or his.

The author invites the novice to examine and test the self against the rigorous criteria of The Scripture, the spiritual father and her own conscience. If the novice feels these three unanimously approve it is time to stop reasoning of her being or God's or of her and God's activities. Until now all this has fed the intellect and led the novice to the threshold of

contemplation and now the novice must learn to “be wholly given to the simple awareness of yourself and God” (P.C. p. 186):

Formerly, they fed your intellect and led you beyond a worldly, material existence to the threshold of contemplation. But imagination and reason have taught you all they can and now you must learn to be wholly given to the simple spiritual awareness of yourself and God. (P.C. p. 186)

Now the author considers time has come for his novice to learn to yield to the simple spiritual awareness of the self and God. This is it: unity of essence and nature at the sovereign point of the Spirit.

As man has prepared himself actively ‘in purity of spirit’, he can only agree with it and give consent to this experience and let it work. Subsequently, all one does is included in the contemplation. Man does everything in this blind seeing of pure, naked existence which is united with God.

With your being you offer all your acts to God. You neither feel nor think as such, since your feeling and thinking are undivided and continuously directed towards God.

In this way you will be more and more stripped off and unclothed of every self-experience and reflective self-consciousness in order to be clothed with the experience of God himself in an incomprehensible way. Yourself being naked and stripped off from experiential feelings and stripped from any focus on yourself – however subtle and ‘harmless’ – you will see God blind as He is in himself. In your blind seeing you will be clothed with Him as He is. That is the mystical union in perfect love. Then you will see your loving God and you will nakedly experience the spiritual union with his love in the farthest point of the soul.”³²⁴

In short: in this part the counsel reflects on what has been experienced and on what the reader has been made aware of until now. The signs are being understood and (eventually) experienced. Since the author directs his counsel not only to his novice, he assumes that there are still those who have not experienced the signs. Therefore he says:

if you have any experience of them, you will be able to test (partially at last). (P.C. p. 186)

So, it is time to check the nature and meaning of the summons and awakening of Grace and prove them in the light of the three witnesses: the Scripture, the spiritual father and her own consciousness. The novice is ready to take the step over the threshold of contemplation and now she must:

³²⁴ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introduction’ *Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*, 1984, p. 9

*learn to be wholly given to the simple awareness of yourself and God. (P.C.
p. 186)*

3.24 Chapter 23

The novice-reader has arrived at the threshold of contemplation in which she is ready to wholly yield to the simple spiritual awareness of her self and God. Now, this new contemplative awareness has been incorporated in the novice-reader. Christ sets the living example of what the author has attempted to transfer through his counsel teaching the novice-reader the contemplative way onto a higher perfection in this life.

The author has also accounted for his counsel theologically to the Gospel next to Christ's life. Both, the scriptures and Jesus Christ show strong illustrations and argumentations of what has been stated in his counsel. As already stated above: standing in the Christian tradition the counsel refers to Jesus Christ to illustrate, to argue and to show the possibility of a higher perfection of man already in this life:

In Christ's life we have a powerful illustration of all I have been trying to say. Had there been no higher perfection possible in this life beyond seeing and loving him in his humanity, I do not believe he would have ascended into heaven while time lasted, nor withdrawn his physical presence from his friends on earth who loved him so dearly. But a higher perfection was possible to man in this life: the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead. (P.C. p. 187)

The author relates his counsel and teaching to the way Jesus Christ taught his disciples to give up dependence on physical presence but also to show that it is not realistic to assume that there would be no higher perfection possible than seeing and loving Jesus Christ in his humanity. In this sense Jesus Christ would have been a social example for mankind on a horizontal level. The counsel wants the reader to deeply realise that there is a higher perfection for man in this life: the real experience of loving Jesus Christ in his Godhead:

He said to them, "It is necessary for you that I go,"³²⁵ meaning, "It is necessary for you that I depart physically from you." The holy doctor of the Church St. Augustine, commenting on these words, says: "Were not the form of his humanity withdrawn from our bodily eyes, love for him in his Godhead would never cleave to our spiritual eyes"³²⁶. And thus I say to you, at a certain point it is necessary to give up discursive meditation and

³²⁵ John 16:7

³²⁶ Augustine, A. *Confessions* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, Harvard University Press, First published 1912, last 2000

learn to taste something of that deep, spiritual experience of God's love.
(P.C. p. 187)

The author quotes St. Augustine to base his counsel on concerning yielding up physical dependency inclusively of the faculties: if the form of Jesus' humanity were not withdrawn from man's physical eyes, his spiritual eyes would never have been able to perceive him in his Godhead or divinity. Again the monk stresses his statement that the novice has to give up discursive meditation so that she is able to grasp something of that deep spiritual contemplative experience of God's love already in this life.

Again, reflecting on his counsel the author mentions Grace again which leads and guides the novice-reader on the spiritual path stressing the vital importance of continually striving towards the naked awareness of offering her being (the first fruit) to God as her most precious gift. Again, the author warns the novice to be sure that her being is naked otherwise one will fall into error, into temptation. The basic instruction of the counsel has been repeated showing the spiral structure of the spiritual and contemplative development represented by the counsel:

Relying on God's Grace to lead and guide you, you will come to this deep experience of his love by following the path I have set before you in these pages. It demands that you always and ever strive toward the naked awareness of your self, and continually offer your being to God as your most precious gift. But I remind you again: see that it is naked, lest you fall into error. Inasmuch as this awareness really is naked, you will at first find it terribly painful to rest in for any length of time because, as I have explained, your faculties will find no meat for themselves in it. (P.C. p. 187)

The author repeats vital instructions of his counsel, but the words have gained a deeper meaning, e.g. 'Grace' carries much more meaning than in the beginning, since it is the highest in-experiencability and inexplicability man can conceive, but now it has become within reach and therefore it has become realistically possible to rely on it. To come to the deep experience of God as he really is, the basic need of striving toward the naked awareness of the self and offering ones being to god as her most precious gift.

The author continually stresses the vital importance of seeing to it that the awareness of the self is naked. He realises the difficulties for his novice who will initially find it very difficult to repose in this naked awareness since the faculties will protest since the will find no "meat" in it. In other words: reposing in her naked awareness does not leave room for the faculties or senses to fall into temptation or long for satisfaction rationally or emotionally. However, the author does not mind the faculties to protest, he tells the novice to let them fast from their natural desires to know. He

clearly repeats his statement that natural knowledge will not enable anyone to taste the spiritual experience of God, since this is a pure gift of Grace. That is why the author stimulates the novice to experience rather than long for knowledge. Knowledge can deceive one, but loving affection will not deceive anyone, according to the author. Knowledge demands labour, but love is rest: *Sciencia inflat, caritas edificat*,³²⁷ knowledge leads to arrogance, love builds up.

All this has already been stated throughout the counsel, but the conditions remain of vital importance since the relationship between God and man is pure and therefore man's heart has to be undividedly directed towards God and a blind naked awareness stripped of all delusions, temptations enable man to become aware of God. Now the novice has become mature in contemplation and when she feels tempted to feed the faculties she can cope and deal with them better without being really worried about going astray since she is merely getting used to it:

But there is no harm in this; in fact, I am actually delighted. Go ahead. Let them fast awhile from their natural delight in knowing. It is well said that man naturally desires to know. Yet at the same time, it is also true that no amount of natural or acquired knowledge will bring him to taste the spiritual experience of God, for this is a pure gift of Grace. And so I urge you: go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds.³²⁸ Knowledge is full of labour, but love, full of rest. (P.C. p. 187 and 188)

The author urges the novice to gain experience rather than knowledge, since knowledge may often deceive and it tends to breed pride while love builds up and is full of rest. The experience the author means is the spiritual experience of God which is a pure gift of Grace referring to Grace itself.

Man should leave everything behind, even the fear of losing God's Grace. Man is capable of uniting, becoming one with God. This means: tuning in onto God's will. This should be the only desire: being completely, contemplatively, one with God. The author acknowledges the daily social problems one encounters, but now one has reached this state of being in which one can withhold from social issues. Think of Mary and Martha. It does not mean that one should deny her social duties, but one should leave her dependence on them, or rather: become independent and free. Being called by Grace and surrender to God, on the threshold of contemplation the novice is challenged to move along and keep God's gracious stirring in motion, both in her personal, spiritual unity with God and in her personal,

³²⁷ 1 Cor. 8:1

³²⁸ Ibid.

spiritual relationship with fellow human beings. One should exceed beyond the self and be free from a self-centred towards a Theo-centred attitude in the purest spiritual sense in the sovereign point of the Spirit. There is a shift from being aware of tokens of Grace and Grace, God himself. Man being totally blind and naked, stripped and unclothed from the self, has finally lost the self, a total self-loss, which is needed to experience the new life brought to mankind by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The daily issues become symbols for God's presence, love and Grace.

It is more than a literary way of expressing words and images. The author tells the novice that she can "see" and "feel" God, not physically or emotionally but as a certain awareness of God's presence and love. The author describes a deep personal, intimate relationship between man and God; an intimate interpersonal relationship in which a deep personal mystical contemplative growth takes place within.

In short: the author has related his counsel to the three witnesses – The Scriptures, his spiritual father and his own conscience – not only to show the reliability of what has been said, but also to emphasise its universal and Christian meaning of all times. In this part the novice can rely on it that it is true. Jesus Christ has shown that a higher perfection in this life is possible: the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead and therefore he had to leave this world. It is necessary to leave the discursive "world" which is directed onto the self in order to come to the deep spiritual experience of God's love.

Man must leave everything behind, even the fear of losing God's Grace. Man is capable of uniting, becoming one with God. This means: tuning in onto God's will. This should be the only desire: being completely, contemplative, one with or in God, being completely spiritually flexible and formed to His will.

3.25 Chapter 24

Even though the counsel has surpassed its own horizon the author does not expect the novice to feel the rest and serenity he has mentioned in the previous chapters. The novice is involved in a severe polarising battle instead; a clashing conflict between the struggling faculties claiming to stop this work on the one hand and the desire to lose her self-experience to experience only God on the other hand:

Yet you may say: “Rest? What can he possibly be talking about? All I feel is toil and pain not rest. When I try to follow his advice, suffering and struggle beset me on every side. On the one hand, my faculties hound me to give up this work, and I will not; on the other, I long to lose the experience of myself and experience only God, and I cannot. Battle and pain assail me everywhere. How can he talk of rest? If this is rest, I think it is a rather odd kind of rest”. (P.C. p. 188)

The author explains why the novice is battling an inner conflict and he reflects on his own experiences admitting that he knows it is really painful. he calls it rest since the spirit rests in a freedom from doubt and it knows that it will not seriously go astray:

My answer is simple. You find this work painful because you are not accustomed to it, and did you realise its value, you would not willingly give it up for all the material joys and rest in the world. Yes, I know, it is painful and toilsome. Still, I call it rest because your spirit does rest in a freedom from doubt and anxiety about what it must do; and because during the actual time of prayer, it is secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err. (P.C. p. 187)

Now the spirit deeply knows. It has set itself free from doubt. It is sure and it knows, but above all: it trusts that it will not go astray. That is the point the author makes: reject self-centred self-experience, be sure that the spirit/soul is blind and naked. The soul, the spirit knows and is focused and oriented since it knows what to do. Not self-affirmation, but the affirmation of the Spirit, the Soul, man's real Being.

This is where the counsel ends in the original middle-English version edited by Phyllis Hodgson. The author reassures the monk-reader that the spirit rests in a freedom from doubt and it surely knows that it will not much err.

The text in this modern English version continues with the monk's/author's last advice to his novice in which he prays for God's support that Jesus

may bring the novice and all those Jesus has redeemed by his precious blood to Glory:

And so persevere in it with humility and great desire, for it is a work that begins here on earth but will go on without end into eternity. I pray that the all-powerful Jesus may bring you and all those he has redeemed by his precious blood to this glory. Amen. (P.C. p. 188)

The mystical relationship between man and God is an everlasting universal point. *The Book of Privy Counseling* has proved itself as a truly spiritual mystical counsel, leading one into the divine dimension of contemplation. The soul is at rest in the divine realms of freedom. She knows and she is secure that she will not easily go astray.

In short: man is not at rest, since he is involved in the daily struggles and battles between the faculties claiming to stop this work of contemplation and the longing desire to lose his self-experience to experience only God. Though the counsel puts man at ease and reassures him/her that he will get used to it. It will become a habit.

The soul, however, is at rest in the divine realms of contemplation. The counsel spirally leads one deeper and deeper into contemplation, constantly calling one “*My dear friend in God*”, sharing its mystical experience to come more and more on equal terms to linger in the spiritual oneness with God’s love. Therefore the counsel will be eternally counselling those who wish to linger in contemplation with the purity of an undivided heart so that one will perceive and feel that it is God, as He really is:

For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in Grace. (P.C. p. 186)

The spirit is free and it rests in freedom from doubt; it knows!

4. Narrative Dynamics of *The Book of Privy Counseling*

In part 3 the research has shown the mystical dynamic content of *The Book of Privy Counseling*. Now, in part 4, the question arises: how does the author narratively influence the (mystical) dynamics in his counsel?

The author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* has been able to guide the novice through the mystical dynamic process by his narrative method of counselling. And, indeed, by and in the narration he has managed to put a mystical dynamic process into motion. This way of counselling can also be indicated as the accompanying way, or spiritual mystical guidance.

As far as points of views within *The Book of Privy Counseling* are concerned it is fundamental to consider how the term ‘counselling’ can be explained in the perspective of medieval times. Which criteria can be detected in *The Book of Privy Counseling*? This will be discussed in chapter 5, in which the mystagogic implications will be dealt with. In Middle English the term ‘counselling’ stands for ‘interpretation’. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the counsel interprets the mystical process using direct speech which characterises its dialogical character. Sometimes indirect speech is used, when the author quotes authorities to convince his novice of the reliability of his counsel and to authorize the counsel.

The word ‘counselling’ is derived from the original term ‘consultatio’, which means ‘consultation’: helping to come into contact with the deepest layers of the self. ‘Consultatio’ can also be translated as ‘spiritual guidance’, as an inner dialogue between God and man. The Counsellor initiates and deepens this dialogue between God and man. Spiritual guidance helps to explore the layers within the self in relationship with God.

As pointed out before, the mystical dynamics lie embedded in the narrative dynamics, in which the ‘implied author’ is positioned. All “parties” involved, the author, both real and implied, and the reader, both real and implied, move along in the process, describing, investigating, stimulating, challenging and moving along in the mystical and narrative dynamic process of the counsel.

As the counsel is a circular spiral process, this means that its inner (internal) movements are circular. As soon as the inner, internal, circular

movements turn inward, *the initiation* into contemplation finds its way in the narrative reading process, in the first place, *by separation*.

After the narrative dynamic reading on initiation, the counsel shows how the narrative dynamics set the mystical dynamics into motion. This part of the narrative reading process can be indicated as *transition*. In the transition one is confronted with God in the ‘liminality’³²⁹ (i.e. over the threshold), beyond reasoning or thinking. In this liminal state one is only conscious of God and his love “totally despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but Him.” (P.C. p. 171)

Victor Turner refers in his book ‘The Ritual Process’ to Arnold van Gennep (1909) who showed ‘that all rites of passage or ‘transition’ are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying “threshold” in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both’.³³⁰ In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author addresses his reader “to go apart to be alone” (P.C. p. 149). During the second phase, the intervening ‘liminal’ period, the characteristics of the ritual subject, the ‘passenger’, are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (re-aggregation or re-incorporation) the passage is accomplished.³³¹

Victor Turner argues that “the attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.”³³² In short, liminality resembles ‘mystical death’.

³²⁹ Turner, V. ‘Liminality and Communitas’ in: *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, University of Virginia, Aldine Publishing Company, New York, 1969, p. 95, Van Gennep, A. *The Rites of Passage*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1909, pp. 23-59.

³³⁰ Turner, V. ‘Liminality and Communitas’ in: *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1969, p. 94

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Idem, p. 95

Liminal beings can be in a position of possessing nothing, of having no status, or property, no rank or position in their (social) system. Their behaviour or attitude is normally passive or humble. Worldly or secular distinctions of status disappear into a near-naked position.

‘Liminality’ can be considered as a universal pattern of stages within initiation. Van Gennep states that one must fulfil certain conditions to pass from one group, or stage, to another, e.g. “for a layman to enter the priesthood or for a priest to be unfrocked calls for ceremonies, acts of a special kind, derived from a particular feeling and a particular frame of mind. So great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred world that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage”³³³. This intermediate stage is the liminal stage. After having gone apart, one passes the threshold away from the profane world and enters into and through the liminal stage onto the sacred world.

Van Gennep divides the ‘rites of passage’ into pre-liminal rites or ‘*rites of separation*’, liminal rites, or ‘*rites of transition*’ and post-liminal rites or ‘*rites of incorporation*’. “Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriage. Transition rites may play an important part in *initiation*.³³⁴ If the transitional period “is sufficiently elaborated to constitute an independent state, the arrangement is reduplicated”.³³⁵

Van Gennep pivots the sacred: “Characteristically, the presence of the sacred (and the performance of appropriate rites) is variable. Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations. A man at home, in his tribe, lives in the secular realm; he moves into the realm of the sacred when he goes on a journey and finds himself a foreigner near a camp of strangers. A Brahman belongs to the sacred world by birth; but within that world there is a hierarchy of Brahman families.”³³⁶

The class of Brahmans, the “twice-born”, exemplifies the transition. The term “twice-born” clearly indicates the true role of rites of passage: the Brahman, who belongs to his caste by birth and is incorporated into it by childhood rites, later undergoes initiation ceremonies enacting death in a previous world and birth in the new one, and giving him the power to devote himself to the “magico-religious” activity which is to be his occupational specialty. ‘Since the Brahman is a born priest, who inherited priesthood by birth, one cannot really speak of his ordination in the Catholic sense; but the novitiate and the initiation are necessary, especially

³³³ Gennep, v. A. ‘*The rites of passage*’, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1960, p. 1

³³⁴ Idem, p. 11

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Idem, p. 12

because of the importance of formulas and their “correct recitation” in Hindu ritual’.³³⁷ One is born a Brahman, but one must learn to act like a Brahman. In other words, within the sacred world which the Brahman inhabits from birth there are three compartments: a pre-liminal one, lasting until the *upanayana* (beginning of a relationship with a teacher), a liminal one (novitiate) and a post-liminal one (priesthood). The succession of periods through which a Brahman passes is identical to that experienced by the son of semi-civilized king, since the entire development of both takes place within the sacred world, while that of a non-Brahman is confined, except for special periods (initiation, sacrifice) to the realm of the profane.³³⁸

The Brahman ceremonies include first a tonsure, then a bath, a change of clothing and finally the teacher takes possession of the child’s heart and at the same time he takes the responsibility for its guidance. ‘Once a child has become a novice (brahma-chari), he is subject to all sorts of taboos; he studies the sacred literature, learns formulas and gestures. His union with the teacher is identified with a marriage; the teacher “conceives” at the moment when he places his hand on the child’s shoulder, and on the third day, when the Gayatri is recited, the child is reborn’.³³⁹ The Gayatri is a prayer taught to the brahma-chari by the teacher during the ceremonies. According to other texts, the Brahman is born “at the moment when the sacrifice turns toward him”.³⁴⁰ ‘After the Brahman’s novitiate comes the ceremony of “return” (*saṁavartana*); the novice takes off the signs of the novitiate and throws them into the water; then he bathes and gets new clothes. He is incorporated into the sacred society through a separation from the transitional period, which is also sacred’.³⁴¹

Whoever passes through the various positions of a lifetime, one day sees the sacred where before he has seen the profane, or vice versa. Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects. That such changes are regarded as real and important is demonstrated by the recurrence of rites, in important ceremonies among widely differing peoples, enacting death in one condition and resurrection in another.

In order to understand the rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of

³³⁷ Idem, p. 104

³³⁸ Idem, p. 105

³³⁹ Idem, pp. 105-106

³⁴⁰ Idem, p. 106

³⁴¹ Ibid.

waiting, and of departure - that is, as rites of passage.³⁴² Here a reference can be made to chapter 16 of *The Book of Privy Counseling* in which the author refers to The Lord who is the door and the porter, determining who can come in or not, in the spiritual sense.³⁴³

The three categories of the rites of passage, separation, transition and incorporation, can be applied to *The Book of Privy Counseling* as follows:

1. In the first stage of *separation* the novice must go apart and free the self from fixed concepts, ideas, ways of living or activities, such as meditating upon one's self or ways of introspection to gain self-awareness. In this first phase she has to break down all self-directed concepts to be ready to encounter a new state of being.
2. In the second stage of *transition* the novice may feel as if being 'in-between' in which she will be totally despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but Him. (P.C. p. 171) In this stage her being is totally stripped of any recognizable image or state of being through which she finds herself in a liminal³⁴⁴ state between previous and future identities. This stage can be compared to a cloud of Unknowing, a quiet darkness before the spiritual union with God. In this stage the transformation takes place.
3. In the final stage of *incorporation* the novice crosses the threshold of contemplation into union, in which the soul finds its rest "in a freedom from doubt and anxiety, feeling secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err." (P.C. p. 188) Therefore it is vital to discern the spirits.

The Book of Privy Counseling sets its reader(s) into motion from the very beginning. Already at the beginning the reader can taste the divinity of *The Book of Privy Counseling*, which is drenched in God. God is the Counsel. This means that all ways or layers are included in each part of the counsel. In other words, the separation in the initiation, the transformation and the discernment of spirits within the incorporation are continually actively present in the counsel's narrative dynamics.

As far as the difference in awareness of the process between the parties involved is concerned, the anonymous author understands and knows the process and the reader is aware of this. In fact, they both understand the process, although the real reader still has to go through the process through the confrontation by the author on the accompanying way of initiation, transformation and the discernment of spirits.

³⁴² Idem, p. 25

³⁴³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 177

³⁴⁴ Gennep, v. A. 'The rites of passage', 1960, pp. 11, 20-21

The challenge of the narrative analysis lies in the task to reveal the organising principle of the text. The narrative dynamics initiate the reader into a growing awareness of the blind feeling. To become aware of the process and its dynamics it is fundamental to reveal the workings of the text on the mystical process of the reader.

So: how does the text organise the growing trust and awareness of the unknowing blind awareness? In other words: how does the text organise the willingness of the reader to go forward on her contemplative path?

It should be constantly kept in mind that the counsel shows both an inward circular spiral structure (internalization) and therefore many elements and stages are repeated before continuation and an ‘outward’ renewing transformed existence (exteriorization).

Narratively speaking the following three narrative layers or paths in the text are distinguished in the text: 4.1 Separation, 4.2 Transformation and 4.3 The incorporation in which the discernment of spirits plays a fundamental role.

4.1 Separation: go apart

*When you go apart to be alone for prayer put from your mind everything you have been doing or planning to do. Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil. See that nothing remains in your conscious mind save a naked intent stretching out toward God.*³⁴⁵ (P.C., p. 149)

Already in the first sentence the author leads his novice-reader into the process of unclothing her mind to come to the naked awareness of being. The counsel shares its conviction of the fundamental condition that the naked awareness is the vital start of the spiritual process. It is blind but aware. It is an unknowing knowing, a naked being. A naked awareness of one's being: to be or Is! The word "Is" initiates the start.

Both the implied author and the implied reader function on the level of 'unknowing'. On the level of knowing the counsel urges its reader to empty the mind.

The reader is being initiated into and confronted with her own unconscious awareness, or rather her deepest naked unknowing awareness of which she is deeply conscious. It is this naked awareness, the naked being or blind seeing of which both the implied author and the implied reader are well aware.

In this advice the counsel has implicitly addressed the reader's unknowing knowing. The narrator and the narratee function on the level of 'knowing' on which they are actually communicating.

The author takes a number of steps. First he addresses his reader as his friend to indicate an equal level of communication in God. He stands next to his novice-reader. He does not only stand next to her but he also explicitly addresses her as his dear friend in God, whom he will teach everything he has learned from His Father and he will share everything he knows himself. He starts arousing her to go along on the mystical path of the Counsel. In the arousals the reader comes to desire more and more to be united in God. Therefore the reader has to leave everything behind, everything which is directed toward herself.

The author teaches the reader how to set herself free from self-centredness or self-directedness:

³⁴⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 149

Put from your mind everything you have been doing or plan to do. Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil. (P.C. p. 149)

To be able to get ahead on the accompanying way the author instructs his reader, step by step, what to do and how to reject self-directedness, identity. The rejection of self-directedness or self-centredness which is focused on one's identity is the fundamental condition to be able to direct oneself onto God in a naked blind awareness. The author explains, supports, stimulates to come to the naked awareness of being. He explains that it does not matter how or who or what one is. The realisation of the fact *that* one is, is fundamental to become aware of the fact that one *is*.

In the counsel it is not only content the author uses to convince his reader. It is also the tone which is set. The style is sometimes ironic or even sarcastic, e.g. where the counsel shows that even the most uneducated person realises that he 'is'. This shows the simplicity of the work. The counsel wants to convince the reader that this mystical process is open to everybody, not only for a few scholars. So, not only the content of the counsel is convincing, the tone and the way in which it is transferred influences the process of the Privy Counseling.

In the initiation the reader has to seclude herself, leaving all means behind that do not bring her closer to God. In this process of detachment or leaving everything behind, the author remains very closely related to his novice-reader in the counselling dialogue. He interacts continuously with his reader to keep the dialogue lively e.g.:

well, do you know this. Yes, and probably you feel that you know only too well from experience. (P.C. p. 152)

To draw the reader into the interactive process of the counsel the author makes use of dialogues to activate the reader to keep going along in the process. The author also shows how obvious his counsel is by emphasizing that the reader does not only know it already, but also feels it from experience. Relying on the reader's knowledge and experience he encourages her to continue:

and so, go down to the deepest point of your mind and think of yourself in this simple, elemental way. (P.C. p. 152)

The novice reader is being taught to leave everything to come to naked being and blind feeling. The naked awareness remains the fundamental condition to proceed on this spiritual journey. This has to be done step by

step. The way seems linear, but during the way it becomes more and more evident that the way is circular. Each step is continually placed in perspective with what lies ahead and is at the same time connected to the past.

The author keeps repeating over and over again how to leave everything behind except the blind awareness of one's naked being.

In order to step forward in the process and rely on the counsel the author repeatedly stresses the use of common sense, the truth of the Scriptures and the reliability of the counsel. The reader recognises her common sense in the fundamental state of being and she learns how to rely on her common sense since she realises a growing naked and pure feeling of the fact that she is. The realisation of that one *is* brings the reader to her common (existential) sense on all levels of the counsel.

Each step is a step of detachment, or letting go, relying on faith, remaining in the naked and blind awareness itself.

The counsel is narratively guiding the novice-reader in her detachment, telling her to disassemble, dismantle everything that stands between her and God, saying:

Go apart to be alone, for prayer. It is the first condition to go apart, to create a distance from the world one used to be part of, in order to pray, to come to terms with the One Who is addressed in prayer.

Put from your mind everything you have been doing or plan to do. Going apart implies not going back in memories, reflections or flashbacks or planning forward. 'Being apart' means: being in the centre of the moment in which there is no memory or plan. It is the present state of mind.

Reject all thoughts. The reader has to empty her mind to be fully receptive and empty, liberated from memories or any other external factors.

Do not pray with words unless you are drawn to this. The reader should become blindly aware, which is inexpressible. Praying is an attitude, an open, naked, aware mind in which words are not needed, unless the reader is drawn to use them. However,

Do not pay attention to words. The reader must realise that words hinder the mind from being empty and naked.

See that nothing remains in your conscious mind save a naked intent stretching out toward God. The reader's mind must be neither dark nor light, but just empty so that it can reach out.

Leave it stripped of every particular idea about God. The mind must be stripped, naked, having nothing, no idea at all, since it must be naked. The mind must be empty and leave no room for concepts or ideas about God's nature. The reader must keep away from ideas about anything.

Keep only the simple awareness that He is as He is. This is a contradictory state of awareness of the one who does not know and of the one who is still aware that he is as he is.

Let him be thus and force him not to be otherwise. To go apart does not only mean to be apart; it also means that the other, God, is apart and should not be forced to be otherwise than as he is. This means the same for the reader: to be as she is and not otherwise. Let Him Be.

Search into him no further. As a consequence of going apart, the reader must let it go, no active searching, just be receptive. No search is needed anymore, just let Him be. Let it be!

Rest in this faith as on solid ground. Faith itself must be the solid ground. Faith is only possible with an empty, naked mind. Emptiness and nakedness form the solid ground. Have faith in the deepest depths without any bottom. Be!

The above shown imperative verbs are clear cut to prevent any misunderstanding, to guarantee coherent communication and above all: to be sure that the reader realises she has to release everything which stands in between, such as; do or don't do these things so that you can....*rest in faith as on solid ground* (P.C. p. 150).

The imperative verbs lead to what the counsel (ultimately) expects of its reader:

The awareness, stripped of ideas and deliberately bound and anchored in faith, shall leave your thought and affection in emptiness except for a naked thought and blind feeling of your own being. (P.C. p. 150).

Here, the counsel makes the reader aware of the naked thought and the blind feeling of her own being. The awareness of one's own being, which is completely empty and naked must be experienced so that it can be offered

to God, blindly and nakedly as soon as the reader crosses the threshold into liminality.

Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you. For I want your thought of self to be as naked and as simple as your thought of self to be as naked and as simple as your thought of God, so that you may be spiritually united to him without any fragmentation and scattering of your mind. (P.C. p. 150).

The quiet darkness, which is God, must be one's whole mind (in spiritual union with God). This is why it is important to go apart and to leave everything behind to be confronted with and initiated into that quiet darkness, God will be one's whole mind. Therefore all self-directed thoughts must be eliminated and any self-reflection must be naked and empty.

To achieve this state of being empty and naked when going apart, it is necessary to be open to the simplicity of the work. The work is simple:

It is not hard to master this way of thinking, think of the most uneducated person who can easily learn it. (P.C. p. 151).

Though the most uneducated person can be aware of the essence of the work, it is complicated to get a theoretical insight of its dynamics.

The narration is telling the reader to get rid of everything that leads to the self. It instructs the reader to leave everything behind which stands between herself and God, resting in faith, in the naked, elemental awareness, confronted with her sick self, taking God as He is:

As plain as common poultice, lay him to your sick self, just as you are. Lift up your sick self; just as you are, and let your desire reach out to touch the good, gracious God, just as he is, for to touch him is eternal health. (P.C. p. 153)

Leave everything behind, do not depend on the senses, accept your sick self, step up bravely and take God as medicine. The sick self is the self that wants to attach and therefore it is sick. The self must be broken down. Identity or anything that is attached must be eliminated.

Then, the narration achieves the impossibility to go further than the naked mind and blind feeling after having stripped of all thought and sensibilities. Nothing is left:

Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you (P.C. p. 150).

Standing naked, unclothed of self, standing eye to eye to the naked awareness of being, being nakedly aware. This state of naked being has already exceeded the senses and the rational mind.

The novice-reader is ready to step ahead and linger in liminality.

4.2 Transition

In the separation in which the reader has gone apart, the reader is more and more detached from fixed concepts, ideas, ways of living or activities such as meditating upon herself or ways of introspection. The reader has gained self-awareness and now she has come into the position to even forget the blind awareness of the naked being. Now, time has come that the reader realises, beyond reason, that she has surpassed the threshold and that she is ready to linger in the “room” of ‘liminality’ in which the transition occurs.

In this second stage, the transition, the novice-reader falls “in-between” in which she

‘will be totally despoiled of self and clothed in nothing, but Him’. (P.C. p. 171):

‘It is true that in the beginning I told you to cover and clothe the awareness of your God with the awareness of yourself, but only because you were still spiritually awkward and crude. With perseverance in this practice, I expected you to grow increasingly refined in singleness of heart until you were ready to strip, spoil, and utterly unclothe your self-awareness of everything, even the elemental awareness of your own being, so that you might be newly clothed in the gracious stark experience of God as he is in Himself.’ (P.C. p. 172)

In this reflection the author illuminates how the counsel leads the novice reader into the present liminal situation. The author accounts for the way the structure of the counselling process has shaped the initiation into separation before he has his novice-reader enter the transition into the liminal transitional stage (of conscious awareness below which something cannot be experienced or felt). The counsel has come to the liminal state of being between the safeties of attachments, as mentioned in the introduction to the phase of separation, having arrived at the naked awareness on the one hand, and not yet being clothed in the experience of God as He is in Himself on the other hand.

In the confrontation of the fundamental shift from the naked awareness of the self, or one’s being, to the awareness of God’s being, the transition from self-being to God’s-being is being articulated explicitly:

It was with an eye to this ultimate experience that I said in the beginning: God is your being. At that time I felt it was premature to expect you to rise suddenly to a high spiritual awareness of God’s being. So I let you climb by

degrees, teaching you first to gnaw away on the naked, blind awareness of yourself until by spiritual perseverance you acquired an ease in this interior work; I knew it would prepare you to experience the sublime knowledge of God's being. And ultimately, in this work, that must be your single abiding desire: the longing to experience only God. (P.C. p. 171)

The counsel reflects on its own steps and strategy to show its complete transparency to gain the reader's trust so that she is prepared to go forward on her contemplative path.

The counsel states its very argument for its workings which is 'Love':

For this is the way of real love. The lover will utterly and completely despoil himself of everything, even his very self, because of the one he loves. He cannot bear to be clothed in anything save the thought of his beloved. And this is not a passing fancy. No, he desires always and forever to remain unclothed in full and final self-forgetting. This is love's labour; yet, only he who experiences it will really understand. This is the meaning of our Lord's words: "Anyone who wishes to love me let him forsake himself." It is as if he were to say: "A man must despoil himself of his very self if he sincerely desires to be clothed in me, for I am the full flowing garment of eternal and unending love". (P.C. p. 172)

This process is not a passing fancy. As soon as one has regained this divine experience one will remain seeking to forget or forsake one's own self.

The reader is nowhere, lost, in the desert, between the past known 'world' and the future or new, unknown 'state'. As Victor Turner argued, liminality is like 'death', 'invisibility', 'darkness'. These terms suit *The Book of Privy Counseling*, in which liminality is called 'darkness', 'ocean'. In more general terms it can also be called 'mystical death':

'Gone will be your new fervour, but gone, too, your ability to meditate as you had long done before. What then, you will feel as if you had fallen somewhere between the two ways having neither, yet grappling for both. And so it will be; but do not be too discouraged. Suffer it humbly and wait patiently for our Lord to do as he will. For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit'. (P.C. p. 183-184).

In the counsel the liminal transition from material life to the life of the spirit is described as a 'spiritual ocean', a turbulent phase in which the reader is urged not to fear or panic:

Even though you think you have great reason to fear, do not panic. Instead, keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord or at any rate, do so as best you can under the circumstances. (P.C. p. 184)

In the deepest, darkest night, or mystical death, which the reader is going through, the counsel promises that God is not far away and this is the time in which the counsel shows the reader God's nearest presence:

Truly, he is not far away and perhaps at any moment he will turn to you touching you more intensely than ever in the past with a quickening of the contemplative grace. (P.C. p. 184)

The counsel permits the novice-reader to linger in death. However, it continually stresses the vital importance of God's presence; even if it is not felt or experienced otherwise by the reader. The counsel keeps on its spiritual track, 'deep within the ocean', supporting the reader not to yield:

Then, for as long as it remains, you will think you are healed and that all is well. But when you least expect, it will be gone again, and again you will feel abandoned in your ship, blown hither and yon, you know not where. Still do not lose heart. I promise you he will return and soon. In his own time he will come. Mightily and more wonderfully than ever before he will come to your rescue and relieve your anguish. As often as he goes, he will come back. (P.C. p. 184)

In this hopeless dark, spiritual mystical death, cut off from every perspective, the counsel contradictorily urges the reader to suffer it with gentle love. Even though it is impossible, the counsel stimulates its reader to rise and:

If you will manfully suffer it all with gentle love, each coming will be more marvellous and more joyful than the last. Remember, all He does, He does with wise intent; He desires that you become as spiritually supple and shaped to His will as a fine Roan glove is to your hand. (P.C. p. 184)

Still being in the liminality of the transition God will come and go preparing, educating, shaping, forming, fashioning the reader:

He will sometimes go and sometimes come, that by both his presence and his absence he may prepare, educate, and fashion you in the secret depths of your spirit for this work of his. In the absence of all enthusiasm he will

have you learn the true meaning of patience. With your enthusiasm gone you will think you have lost him, too, but this is not so. (P.C. p. 184)

Patience is a key issue in the liminality of the transition since emotions, enthusiasm or burning desires may be tokens of grace but they are not Grace itself. God will never withdraw His grace which:

in itself is so high, so pure, and so spiritual that our senses and emotions are actually incapable of experiencing it. (P.C. p. 185)

Lingering in the liminality of the transition is a long exercise of trust, love and faith. These have to last eternally and therefore God works in two ways: teaching patience in the absence of the tokens of Grace and stimulating to grow strong in their coming. Everything which occurs in the liminal phase of transition is meant to make the reader to:

become so joyfully and supple and so sweetly pliable that He can lead you at last to the spiritual perfection and union with His will, which is perfect love. (P.C. p. 185)

4.3 The discernment of the spirits in the incorporation

In the final stage of ‘incorporation’ the novice-reader crosses the threshold of contemplation into union. A spiritual synonym for ‘incorporation’ is ‘unification’. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* this stage of incorporation or unification is presented in chapter 21 and at the end of the counsel when it states:

Finally, the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which, as we know, is one in essence and nature. For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in grace. (P.C. p. 186)

It is this “unifying” experience in which the spirit has become one with God in grace which sets the incorporation into motion.

However, the novice-reader is still on her way, partly unified and still restlessly suffering and struggling not to yield to the faculties and to lose the experience of the self and experience only God. According to the counsel she is not yet used to it, but:

Your spirit does rest in a freedom from doubt and anxiety about what it must do; it is secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err. (P.C. p. 188)

The soul “knows” and relies on its knowledge that it is right so that it can linger in this awareness.

And now it is necessary to go into the discernment of spirits: there will be times and occasions which may confuse, test or even trial the soul and then, to be sure that the soul will not greatly err, it is of fundamental importance to ‘know’ that it is ‘true’ that it is God who is working in the soul and not the self. Therefore it is vital to make a distinction between what is right or wrong and what is directed towards the self or to God. This ability to make distinctions is considered as ‘the discernment of the spirits’.³⁴⁶ The author explicitly teaches his novice-reader how to be able to distinguish, or how to discern the spirits. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author makes his

³⁴⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp.181 - 182

reader aware of how to make the right distinction between one's own perception and God's:

And so, when in this work you become aware that you are perceiving and experiencing self and not God, be filled with sincere sorrow and long with all your heart to be entirely absorbed in the experience of God alone. (P.C. p. 172)

However, it is important to realise that *the elemental sense of one's blind being will remain between you and your God.* (P.C. p. 173)

Still, keeping in mind that one's blind being will always remain between man and God, it is important to continually investigate the 'truth' by checking whether it is God working or the working of one's self (through the faculties, one's fantasy, or mind). Here it is important whether one experiences through the faculties (sees a fantasy or realises the mystical reality through one's mind) or whether the experience is being moved by God (God's Love and Grace). As soon as one realises that the experience has sprung from the self, it is important to accept this as one's own experience and here, as far as the discernment of spirits is concerned, it is essential not to project one's own experiences on God. If one does so, one tries to 'possess' God, being directed towards the self instead of being directed toward the other, God. In this case one has not offered the self to God, but one uses God to fulfil one's own desires. This the research considers as the 'instrumentalization' of God for one's own benefit.

The counsel challenges the reader to consider whether the faculties bring her to contemplation:

Tell me now; do you still expect your faculties to help you reach contemplation? (P.C. p. 173)

There is more to it than 'just' using the mental capacities, or rational reasoning to reach contemplation. Contemplation is beyond these capabilities. The faculties merely hinder one to reach spiritual rest in contemplation since they spring out of one's own self and this is exactly what should not be stimulated in opening one's being to the being of God.

Not only the (mental) faculties hinder the reader to reach contemplation, the same counts for meditations, since they may divert one into fantasy or other imaginary state of being:

Imaginative and speculative meditations, by themselves, will never bring you to contemplative love. Be they ever so unusual, subtle, lovely, or deep; be they of your sinful past, the Passion of Christ, the joys of our Lady, or the saints and angels in heaven, or God's, they are useless in contemplative prayer. For myself, I choose to have nothing except that naked, blind sense of my self which I spoke of earlier. (P.C. p. 174)

The author admits the value of meditations, especially for beginners, but for contemplation they are useless. They are still related to one's own self. The author stresses the choice for the naked blind sense of self, nothing more, nothing less, as a condition to even give this up.

However, it is of vital importance for a sinner to meditate and grieve over sin and find joy in goodness. In this sense it is necessary to meditate and remain outside contemplation:

Outside of God's special intervention, I believe it is humanly impossible for a sinner to come to peaceful repose in the spiritual experience of himself and of God until he has first exercised his imagination and reason in appreciating his own human potential, as well as the manifold works of God, and until he has learned to grieve over sin and find his joy in goodness. (P.C. p. 174)

Meditation is a condition to appreciate one's own and God's potential and to learn to regret one's sins finding pleasure in doing well, enjoying goodness. As long as one has not been able to do so, one should remain outside contemplation:

Believe me, whoever will not journey by this path will go astray. One must remain outside contemplation, occupied in discursive meditation, even though he would prefer to enter into the contemplative repose beyond them. (P.C. p. 174)

Now the counsel has reached the crucial threshold of purification of one's sins to enjoy one's pleasure in goodness. And still, it is not up to man to take the first step into contemplation:

Many mistakenly believe that they have passed within the spiritual door when, in reality, they are still outside it. What is more, they shall remain outside until they learn to seek the door in humble love. Some find the door and enter within sooner than others, not because they possess a special admittance or unusual merit, but simply because the porter chooses to let them in. (P.C. p. 175)

The porter admits entrance to those whom he chooses to enter. Here, the porter is God, who decides who will enter or remain outside. In the 'household of the spirit' God is the porter as God and he is the door as man. Those who enter by God and Jesus Christ, will '*go in and out and find pastures*' (P.C. p. 175) of devotion. This means, that one will enter through God and through humanity.

If one tries to enter the household of the spirit in another way than through God in his humanity, he is deceitful:

Yet some will refuse to enter through this door, thinking to reach perfection by other ways... by all sorts of clever speculations, indulging their unbridled and undisciplined faculties in strange, exotic fantasies, scorning the common, open entry and the reliable guidance of a spiritual father. Such a person is not only a night thief but a day prowler. ...for under the guise of an authentic spiritual life he secretly steals and arrogates to himself the outward signs and expressions of a true contemplative, while inwardly his life bears none of its fruits. (P.C. p. 176)

He that enters not through the door but climbs up another way the same is a thief and a robber (P.C. p. 176)

Van Gennep noted in 'The rites of passage' that only the main door is the site of entrance and exit rites, perhaps because it is consecrated by a special rite. The other openings do not have the same quality of a point of transition. Therefore thieves prefer to enter otherwise than through the door. These practices are intended to prevent the pollution of a passage which must remain uncontaminated once it has been purified. Sometimes the sacred value of the threshold is present in all the thresholds.³⁴⁷

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author warns that man has to go through (God's) humanity. He teaches the novice-reader how to enter, step by step, first: meditate on the Passion of Christ and feel sorry for her own sins, which caused this Passion, and lift up the heart to receive the love and goodness of God. The incarnation takes place when rationality remains at the door and when Love and (free) Will enter.

If one does so, he will have '*plenty of devotion to nourish the health of his spirit and bring him to salvation*'. (P.C. p. 176)

³⁴⁷ Gennep, van A. *The rites of passage*, 1960, p. 25

The author keeps carefully instructing and showing how the novice-reader can discern the spirits. When man has found the door, what should one do? The answer is clear and simple:

Wait at the door. Because until now the novice-reader has led a ‘*crude sort of existence according to the flesh, and his spirit is corroded with a great rust*’. (P.C. p. 177)

The novice-reader will be ready as soon as her conscience and the spiritual father agree that ‘*this rust has been largely rubbed off*’. But this is not enough:

One must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within. This secret invitation from God’s Spirit is the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing a person to a higher life in grace of contemplation. (P.C. p. 177)

And here it is essential to discern whether one is really called to a higher life of grace in contemplation or not, to salvation or to perfection:

For it will happen that a man reads or hears about contemplation and increasingly feels in his ordinary devotions a gently mounting desire to be more intimately united to God, even in this life, through the spiritual work he has read or heard about. Certainly, this indicates that grace is touching him, because others will hear or read of the same thing and be quite unmoved, experiencing no special desire for it in their daily devotions. These folk do well to go on standing patiently at the door, as those called to salvation but not yet to its perfection. (P.C. p. 177)

It is important to see the distinction between those who are called to salvation and those who are called to perfection. God determines to which one man is called and therefore:

Be at peace in your own calling. (P.C. p. 178)

In the process of interiorisation the author states that there are two ways: waiting outside in meditation and enter by contemplation. However, the first one is good, the second one is better. Both are precious, but realise that without God no one can do anything: ‘*Without me you can do nothing*’:

It is as if he were to say: “Unless I first stir you and attract you, and you then respond by consenting and suffering my action, nothing you do will completely please me” And you know by now that the contemplative work I have been describing must, of its nature, be wholly pleasing to God. (P.C. p. 178)

The author keeps stressing that it is God who determines everything, not man. He discusses the distinction between Man as the principal worker in

good works and God as the principal worker. However, in everything that has any relation to contemplation God alone is the chief worker and:

he will act in no one who has not laid aside all exercise of his natural intellect in clever speculation (P.C. p. 179)

Nevertheless, in every good work man acts in partnership with God, using his natural wit and knowledge to the best advantage. Here He consents to the act and assists man through secondary means.

which the author calls the three witnesses:

the light of the Scripture, reliable counsel, and the dictates of common sense, which include the demands of one's state, age, and circumstances in life. (P.C. p. 179)

Therefore it is important not to go after any inspiration until one has rationally tested it in the light of the above mentioned three witnesses: the Bible, a reliable counsel and one's Common sense.

The author states: *take this as a general principle: we can do nothing without him; nothing good or nothing evil; nothing active or nothing contemplative.* (P.C. p. 180)

Without me you can do nothing. Here he speaks to everyone, since everyone on earth falls into one of these three groups: sinners, actives, or contemplatives. (P.C. p. 180)

In these three categories God works differently and it is important to realise and recognize that God is present in everyone, although in different ways:

In sinners He is actively present, permitting them to do as they will; in actives, He is present, permitting and assisting; and in contemplatives, as sole master, awakening and leading them in this divine work. (P.C. p. 180)

The author emphasises the importance of discerning whether to use the faculties or not in order to prevent a decline and be trapped by certain deceptions which would entangle the novice-reader:

I wanted you to understand when to use your faculties and when not to; and to see how God acts in you when you do use them; and when you do not. I felt this was important because this knowledge might prevent you from falling into certain deceptions which could otherwise have ensnared you. (P.C. p. 180)

The distinction between internal and exterior signs of grace is made. The interior sign reveals itself as a growing desire for contemplation constantly interfering in one's daily commitments. Though the spirit blindly desires there is a spiritual awareness which stimulates and increases the longing for contemplation:

It is a blind longing of the spirit and yet there comes with it a kind of spiritual sight which both renews the desire and increases it. (I call this desire blind; because it resembles the body's faculty of motion – as in touching or walking- which as you know does not direct itself and is, therefore, in a way blind). If they are filled with memories of your own sinfulness, considerations of Christ's Passion, or anything else pertaining to the ordinary Christian way of prayer, know that the spiritual insight accompanying and following upon this blind desire originates in your ordinary grace. And this is a sure sign that God is not stirring you or calling you to a more intense life of grace as yet. Rather, he is giving you this desire as food and strength to go on waiting quietly and working in your ordinary grace.

The exterior sign arouses when someone hears or reads about contemplation. This sign comes from external sources and comes in through the senses. If one is only touched and moved as long as the manifestation of the sign takes place and if the longing desire disappears as soon as the manifestation ends, then one is not specially touched by grace:

The exterior sign manifests itself as a certain joyful enthusiasm welling up within you, whenever you hear or read about contemplation. I call it exterior because it originates outside you and enters your mind through the windows of your bodily senses when you read. As for the discernment of this sign, see if that joyful enthusiasm persists, remaining with you when you have left your reading. If it disappears immediately or soon after and does not pursue you in all else you do, know that it is not a special touch of grace. (P.C. p. 182)

Considering both signs separately, there is not a special touch of grace. The touch of God calling to a higher life of grace will cause different effects, since the touch is so 'abounding' that it will always follow one:

to bed at night and rise with you in the morning. It will pursue you through the day in everything you do, intruding into your daily devotions like a barrier between you and them. The enthusiasm and the desire will seem to be part of each other; so much so, that you will think it is only one desire you feel, though you will be at a loss to say just precisely what it is that you long for. Your whole personality will be transformed; your countenance will radiate an inner beauty, and for as long as you feel it nothing will sadden you. A thousand miles would you run to speak with another who you knew really felt it, and yet when you got there, find yourself speechless. (P.C. p. 183)

Here the one is completely transformed and the author gives concrete examples and descriptions of one's being, attitude and behaviour in this

transformation. It is the oneness which proves that God is calling one to enter, to come in and head for a more intense life of grace:

Thus the mounting desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm that seizes you when you read or hear of it meet and become one. These two signs, one interior and one exterior, agree and you may rely on them as proof that God is calling you to enter within and begin a more intense life of grace. (P.C. p. 183)

Now the novice-reader must be careful in this ecstatic experience, which might cause the wrong attachment to the experience itself. But all these abounding experiences may disappear and leave one alone, bereft, even frightened of being deserted:

You will learn that all I have written of these two signs and their wonderful effects is true. And yet, after you have experienced them, a day will come then they disappear, leaving you, as it were, barren; or, as it will probably seem to you then, worse than barren. (P.C. p. 183)

The disappearance of the signs can cause panic and now it is vital not to lose courage. The author compares this experience to a voyage on the spiritual ocean, a voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit. He warns his novice-reader that

Great storms and temptations shall doubtlessly arise during this journey, leaving you bewildered and wondering which way to turn for help, for your affection will feel deprived of both your ordinary grace and your special grace. Yet I say again: fear not. Even though you think you have great reason to fear, do not panic. Instead, keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord or at any rate, do so as best you can under the circumstances. (P.C. p. 184)

Make no mistake about this: God may at times withdraw sweet emotions, joyful enthusiasm and burning desires, but He never withdraws his grace from those He has chosen, except in the case of deadly sin. Of this I am certain. All the rest, emotions, enthusiasm, and desires, are not in themselves grace, only tokens of grace. (P.C. p. 184–185).

This is what the novice-reader must always realise: the tokens of Grace may be nice, but they are not Grace itself!:

Grace is so high, so pure and so spiritual that our senses and emotions are actually incapable of experiencing it. (P.C. p. 185)

God works in two ways to lead man to spiritual perfection: he teaches how to hold on in the absence of sensible fervour and its coming. ...to lead man to the spiritual perfection and union with his will, which is perfect love (P.C. p. 185):

In this time of suffering your love becomes both chaste and perfect. It is then that you will see your God and your love, and being made spiritually one with his love, nakedly experience him at the sovereign point of your spirit. Here, utterly despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but him, you will experience him as he really is, stripped of all the trapping of sensible delights, though these be the sweetest and most sublime pleasures possible on earth. This experience will be blind, as it must be in this life; yet, with the purity of an undivided heart, far removed from all the illusion and error liable to mortal man, you will perceive and feel that it is mistakenly he, as he really is. (P.C. p. 185–186)

And finally, to discern the spirits, the author offers tests to be sure of the truth of the counsel. First the evidence of the signs:

here are the signs you asked for. If you have any experience of them, you will be able to test the nature and meaning of the summons and awakening of grace which you feel touching you interiorly and exteriorly. (P.C. p. 186)

And then the evidence contributed by the Scripture, the spiritual counsellor and one's own conscience:

Test yourself against the rigorous criteria of Scripture, your spiritual father, and your own conscience. It is time to lay aside speculative reasoning and profound imaginative reflections on the subtleties of your being or God's, of your activities or his. (P.C. p. 186)

In a reflection the counsel partly shows its own counselling strategy by saying:

Formerly they fed your intellect and led you beyond a worldly, material existence to the threshold of contemplation. But imagination and reason have taught you all they can and now you must learn to be wholly given to the simple spiritual awareness of yourself and God. (P.C. p. 186).

There will always be yourself, but the perspective has changed from self-directedness to eternal directedness from God's perspective with which one has become One: *the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead. (P.C. p. 187)*

Again, the counsel keeps warning and sharp in its discernment to see to it that one's awareness is naked, free from self-experience:

Relying on God's Grace to lead and guide you, you will come to this deep experience of love by following the path I have set before you in these pages. It demands that you always and ever strive toward the naked awareness of your self, and continually offer your being to God as your most precious gift. But I remind you again: see that it is naked, lest you fall into error. (P.C. p. 187)

The counsel shows its own final perspective, followed by warnings and instructions, which suits its infinite spiral circulating process:

Finally, the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which, as we know, is one in essence and nature. For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in grace. (P.C. p.186)

Still it remains painful, but the soul is at rest since:

It is secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err. (P.C. p. 188)

God's reality has incarnated in man. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* this means that God has incarnated in the author. Through the author God has written the Book in which the reader is invited to participate and go along. God and man become more and more united throughout the process in which also man's work transforms into God's Work.

As a conclusion it can be stated that it is the narrative dynamic process which draws the parties involved into the deeper layers of spiritual mystical being.

The author illuminates the workings of the counsel as a circular spiral process which has led the novice reader into the present liminal situation. The author accounts for the way the structure of the counselling process has shaped the initiation into separation before he has his novice-reader enter the transition into the liminal transitional stage (of conscious awareness below which something cannot be experienced or felt). The counsel has come to the liminal state of being between the safeties of attachments, as mentioned in the introduction to the phase of separation, having arrived at the naked awareness, on the one hand, and not yet being clothed in the experience of God as he is in himself on the other hand.

During the transition from the separation to the transformation the author is going to help the reader how to discern the spirits by constantly heeding the counsel, the scriptures and common sense, focussing on the perspective of union with God. Each step is a step of letting go, reliance on faith, remaining in the naked and blind awareness itself.

In this part of the narrative the reader is between naked awareness of being and being despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but God. In this transforming state the counsel has reflected on its own process to make it completely transparent to the reader to head forward onto the deeper mystical contemplation of becoming newly clothed in God.

5. The Mystagogic implications of *The Book of Privy Counseling*

Through the mystical and narrative dynamical readings the inner logic of *The Book of Privy Counseling* has revealed itself to the reader, who has become more and more aware of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. This process consists of subsequent circular steps in a circular movement. The counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the counsel and from the perspective of the reader. Therefore this chapter will deal with the three stages seen from both perspectives.

Both the counsel and the reader listen to God who is the explicit horizon of both. The counsel has trodden the divine path of Contemplation and it goes along with its reader, leading her into the divine realms of Contemplation. The counsel is the first listener to God in its own initiation and it takes the reader along in the initiation onward into Contemplation. In this process the counsel is being recreated, reshaped and transformed and at the same time the reader is being recreated, reshaped and transformed as well.

The counsel has already gone the way, perhaps several times, and it is able to articulate the whole process explicitly, but each time when it takes a novice-reader along in its process it articulates the initiation again and again. Both, the counsel and the reader, experience the same process and they both linger in the transitional liminal phase. (See chapter 4 Narrative Dynamics) However, the counsel is in advance since it can explicitly articulate the process which the reader unknowingly knows or does not know at all or of which she has become slightly aware.

Mystagogy encompasses the process of guiding and initiating the reader into the mystical realms of contemplation. In the mystagogy the differences between the counsel and the reader are evident, but the ultimate focus is on God, who is the being of all, and therefore the being of both the counsel and the novice-reader.

5.1 The mystagogic implications of The Counsel

The counsel leads its reader into its own mystical dynamic process by a narrative so close to the reader that the reader does not only read but she is also granted admission to the counsel. The reader is then led deeper into the mystical process of which the first step is to release everything to fully concentrate on Being. Thus she becomes aware of her own being in which she fully IS, nothing more, nothing less.

The concern of the counsel is not to concentrate on what, who, how or where man is, but solely on Being itself: *that one* is.

The counsel shows its way from several perspectives relating to historical, theological, experiential, biblical and spiritual sources, to show, how it is embedded in its past and contemporary, spiritual tradition, its reliability and divine truth. In the counsel man and God are present in a lively relationship.

The counsel starts with ‘My Dear Friend in God’, addressing the reader as friend in God, relating to John’s gospel,³⁴⁸ saying:

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

This way of addressing the reader with ‘*My dear friend in God*’ can also be related to a medieval concept of ‘Gottesfreunde’: meeting the other in God, indicating a mystical interpersonal relationship between God and man. (See section 3.1: The Mystical Dynamics foreword).

Right at the beginning the author explicitly takes position as the representative of Jesus Christ, speaking through the counsel, transferring God’s Counsel into the process in which the reader is being positioned as the “dear friend in God”.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ John 15: 12-17

³⁴⁹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 149

The counsel addresses its reader as '*My dear friend in God*', as one who already "knows" and who has already been informed of what the counsel will bring. In fact, the reader is already (unknowingly) implicitly aware of the counsel and now the initiation into the mystical process will be articulated explicitly.

The counsel is presented as God's words. The author presents himself as a representative of God initiating those who share the same disposition. Implicitly he addresses anyone with the same disposition to take up the (reading) work.

The author is anonymous. Considered from the divine perspective of the counsel the author cannot bear a name, or any personal identity, since he addresses humanity from a divine dimension. The divine dimension does not bear a name, nor does God or the Holy Spirit, which lingers in 'Being'. Therefore the counsel is a divine work. It must be the final work of the anonymous author, who lingers in the divine dimension of the Holy Spirit.

Already from the beginning the counsel claims an appropriate attitude towards its divine dimension from its reader who has to put everything from the mind except a naked intent stretching out toward God, leaving everything behind which stands in between her and God. So: no thoughts, no intentions, no emotional feelings, nothing, except the simple awareness that God is as He is and that the reader is as she is.

The work is being described as '*this contemplative work in which you think of self and of him in the same way: that is with the simple awareness that he is as he is, and that you are as you are. In this way your thought will not be fragmented or scattered, but unified in him who is all*'.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p.150

5.2 The mystagogic implications for the reader

The reader is being addressed as the novice, who receives the counsel in a narrative. The narrative “talks” and “tells” itself to the novice reader. The reader and novice are interchangeable, perhaps even identical as soon as the counsel finds entrance into him or her.

As soon as the counsel begins, the dialogue has already started. If the reader can identify herself with the addressee or can recognize herself as ‘My dear friend in God’, the dialogue will be mutually understood.

Then the reader is embraced as ‘my dear friend in God’, for whom this book is personally meant. The reader does not have to take others into consideration or to worry about the world around, since the book is intended to discuss the reader’s own interior work of contemplation as both, the counsel and the reader, have come to understand it. The reader already has an understanding of her interior work of contemplation. The reader is in a contemplative state of being in a way which she is aware of.

The focus is entirely on the reader, even though others are addressed as well. The open address gives room for everybody reading the book to enter the counselling process. It supplies an open invitation to continue reading and to remain involved in the process. The open and focussed attention invites the reader to enter. The counsel and the reader are already very closely and “privy” related:³⁵¹

I am writing for you alone it is you alone I have in mind right now, and Iintend to discuss your interior work of contemplation as I have come to understand it and you.. (P.C. p. 149)

Anyone else sharing the interior dispositions and likely to profit from this book, is very welcome to it and the counsel will be delighted. So, reading this book is permitted to everybody, including the reader. The book is privy, but not exclusive. Anybody can enter into the relation in privy counselling. This means that it is the reader who takes the step into the continuation of the process of *The Book of Privy Counselling*, into which she is drawn. Therefore it is a matter of feeling, being called or drawn into the process and it is a matter of choice, taking part in it or not.

Before the reader has ended the foreword she has already decided to proceed or not. Whoever the reader is:

³⁵¹ See title ‘*The Book of Privy Counseling*’

It is you alone I have in mind right now, and your interior life, as I have come to understand it. And so, to you (and others like you) I address the following pages. (P.C. p. 149)

The reader is very welcome and free to accept the invitation to enter the counsel which directly starts instructing immediately after the foreword.

The reader has the same spiritual reference concerning prayer as the counsel. The reader knows which posture is suitable for praying and which words to choose to express prayer. But now the prayer should be empty, meaning wordless and completely silent. This might be new to the reader. The prayer changes from expression to impression. It changes from verbal praying to empty silence, in which all thoughts have to be rejected, whether they are good or bad. All the words which have been learned to use for prayer, have to be deleted or erased. Nothing, not a single word should remain in the conscious mind, except:

a naked intent stretching out toward God. (P.C. p. 149)

This means, that the first condition before starting the work is to let everything go which might stand between man and God: complete detachment.

The reader recognises this orientation: to empty the mind nakedly stretching out toward God without any intention. In case the reader does not know the way, the counsel shows the way step by step by using do's and don'ts, e.g. do not pray with words, do not weigh their meaning, do not be concerned. If the reader does not follow the instructions, this will be the end of the counsel. However, the instructions initiate something which is worthwhile: stretching out toward God. They include a promise: coming close to God.

The reader has to give up any ideas about God and be aware that God is as he is. This is completely opposite to what the reader(s) may have done before. The reader can stop searching and researching God, stop forcing and shaping God in any concept or idea, but rest in faith which is in itself the solid ground. Here, the reader has to leave everything behind, except the naked thought and blind feeling of her own being.

Her being is transformed into a pure longing desire, detached and independently rooted in faith in God, saying:

That which I am I offer to you, O Lord, without looking to any quality of your being but only to the fact that you are as you are; this, and nothing more. (P.C. p. 150)

All this is blind and formlessly dark and this darkness seeks admission to fill her whole mind which is a mirror to oneself, in order to think of the self in the same way as it thinks of God: naked, so that one may be spiritually united to God without any *fragmentation and scattering of your mind*. (P.C. p. 150)

The reader has already become aware of the goal of the counsel: being spiritually united to God. This may be achieved and therefore it is a promise, worthwhile to live after, since:

He is your being and in him, you are what you are, not only because he is the cause and being of all that exists, but because he is your cause and the deep centre of your being. Therefore, in this contemplative work think of yourself and of him in the same way: that is, with the simple awareness that he is as he is, and that you are as you are. (P.C. p. 150)

5.3 Mystagogic implications of being

The first fundamental condition to start the contemplative work is the realisation, or the awareness of ‘Being’. The counsel emphasises Being as the divine fundament of existence:

For I repeat: all things exist in him; he is the being of all. (P.C. p. 150)

God is not only the being of everything that exists, but he is also his own cause and the deep centre of his own being. Since our being is God’s Being, it is important to accept this. There is no return, rejection or flight possible. God is our cause and deep centre of our being.

Therefore the reader is challenged to go down to the deepest point of the mind and not worry about what, or how she is, but *that she Is*, nothing more or less. The counsel contemplates on the fundamental attention to ‘Being the one who Is’, like God, who is the one who *IS*.

First the process is directed inwardly into ‘Being’ and from this point of Being one is able to share one’s being. To illustrate this, the counsel refers to Proverbs in which Solomon instructs his son to:

*Worship the Lord with your substance and feed the poor with your first fruits. Thus shall your barns be filled with abundance and your presses run over with wine.*³⁵² (P.C. p. 155)

The counsel is explicit about its own spiritual character and the spiritual meaning of its quotation from Proverbs to help its reader to understand the counsel and the quotation *spiritually according to the sense in which I, standing in his (Solomon’s) place, now explain it to you: My dear friend in God, go beyond your intellect’s endless and involved investigations and worship the Lord your God with your whole being.* (P.C. p. 155)

In this recommendation the counsel repeats its position as “standing in his place” and therefore it demands a divine, contemplative attitude from its reader who is “My dear friend in God” and fully aware of her contemplative position in this process.

First, man is called To Be and then called to share his ‘Being’. This is the first fruit and this has to be shared and to be fed to the poor. The poor are the ones in need, all brothers and sisters by nature of Grace. One’s being

³⁵² Proverbs 3:10

and existence, with all kinds of talents and gifts, has to be “*drawn together in a single all-embracing prayer*” in which one offers everything to God and help humanity:

That which I am and the way I am, with all my gifts of nature and Grace, you have given to me, O lord, you are all this. I offer it all to you, principally to praise you and to help my fellow Christians and myself. (P.C. p. 156)

One’s being, everything included, will be offered to God, to honour God and not only for the service to the fellow human beings but also for the self. The existential offer is not only to praise God and help the other, but also to help the self. This is not only an outward movement but also an inward movement.

God alone is His own cause and His own being and the being of everything that exists. God is wholly separate and distinct from every created thing. This is a fundamental distinction which supplies extra security to the reader’s faith, since God is eternally present in mankind, even when one does not recognize this as such. Therefore it is fundamental to rely on this truth expressed by the counsel: that God is cause and being, not only of everything that exists, but He is *your* cause and *your* being. This divine truth is close and direct, no escape is possible.

The reader is assumed to admit Grace to unite her thought and affection to God, while rejecting minute research into details of her own or God’s being, so that she admits Grace to feed her with the experiential knowledge of God as He really is.

However:

In this life, this experience will always remain dark and partial so that your longing desire for him be ever newly enkindled. Look up joyfully, then, and say to your Lord, in words of desire:

That which I am, I offer to you, O Lord, for you are it entirely. (P.C. p. 156)

The reader realises that this is *it*. If she is prepared and able to rely on this counsel she may trust that this experience is fundamentally real. The counsel is realistic enough to state that this experience will always remain partial and dark. Therefore *it* will continually feed the curiosity and spiritually longing desire for God. This experience may be so strong that

the reader might express the longing desire to offer the self to God, since God *is* her entirely. God *is* man.

This is such a confronting statement that going any further is not wise. But now, what can the reader do? It seems obvious what one should do: look up joyfully and say: “that which I am I offer to you, for you are it entirely”. If one is convinced of this, no questions would arise anymore. However, questions always arise, since one can be curious, rational, emotional and not rooted in faith and continually in need to be convinced, even if one has been confronted with the experiential evidence. Think of Thomas who was difficult to convince without experimental proof.³⁵³

The reader continually finds support in the process of *The Book of Privy Counseling* realizing that it is not difficult to master this way of thinking, since even the most uneducated man or woman, leading a primitive way of life, is able to learn it. And this idea, that even the simplest person can acquire this way of living, may be an extra challenge to the reader, especially when the reader is a well-educated scholar since if it is so simple, it can be achieved. It is at the same time a comfort and a challenge. The reader may feel ashamed if she is not able to carry out this work. However, it is a great work of trust and detachment not only for the educated, but also for the uneducated, for everyone feeling attracted towards it. Think of the biblical expression that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for the wealthy, well supported souls to become sensitive to the experiential knowledge of being.

The reader should be ashamed when she is not able to *think and feel that he is; not how or what he is, but that he is*.³⁵⁴

In the realisation and experience of self-existence, of being, mankind stands *apart in creation, far above all the beasts, as the only creature graced with reason.* (P.C. p. 152)

This can be experienced as an appeal to the reader’s reasoning capabilities, though in the way in which it should be properly applied to in the sense of descending into a fully conscious naked awareness in a simple elemental way. This is a challenge to the reader and here again the reader is confronted with experiential evidence that:

³⁵³ John 20:24-29

³⁵⁴ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 152

Others will mean the same thing, but because of their experience, speak of the mind's "pinnacle" and of this awareness as the "highest human wisdom". (P.C. p. 152)

This awareness is being described as the highest human wisdom and the 'pinnacle', the summit of the mind. It is the highest challenge to human mankind.

Though the counsel respects the intelligence and subtle introspection which may have been accomplished with the help of God's Grace, the reader has come to understand what she really is:

a human being by nature and a pitiful, fallen wretch through sin. Well, do you know this? Yes, and probably you feel that you know only too well, from experience, the defilements that follow and befall a man because of sin. Fie on them! Forget them, I pray you.remember that you also possess an innate ability to know that you are and that you can experience this without any special natural or acquired genius. (P.C. p. 153)

The reader is confronted with her humanity, weaknesses and sins. The dialogue explicitly supplies an active part to the reader by expressing an affirmative reaction to the counsel. The reader "admits guilt" and therefore bears full responsibility and after confessing guilt the sins can be forgotten in order to switch over to the existential realisation of realizing *that you are*. The reader does not have to worry about acquiring special complicated skills. The realisation of her existential awareness gives room to experience that one is *without any special natural or acquired genius*. (P.C. p. 153)

It seems contradictory and confusing to the reader that, though it is not hard to master "this way of thinking" it is the highest accomplishment offered to mankind since it leads to the highest wisdom.

The spiritual process of the counsel is an inward movement towards Being lingering in the most sovereign point of the spirit, followed by an outward movement to share Being for the benefit of all. The mystical process of the counsel not only requires sharing her being for the benefit of all mankind, it must be offered to God so that only the being of God is experienced:

But now I want you to understand that although in the beginning I told you to forget everything save the blind awareness of your naked being, I intended all along to lead you eventually to the point where you would forget even this, so as to experience only the being of God (P.C. p. 171)

Though, in the beginning it is clear that one is aware of the mystical (implications of the) process of the counsel, it is necessary to repeat it, since now the unknowing awareness has to be transferred into a Divine awareness in which one becomes Aware. A shift from human awareness to divine Awareness is to be realised.

These oppositional perspectives, of the human and Divine, are being transferred into a new perspective of being:

It was with an eye to this ultimate experience that I said in the beginning: God is your being. (P.C. p. 171)

The notion of God being her being is the ultimate divine experience which originates from before the beginning, but now it is noted and explicitly known. The counsel reflects on its own didactics to show that now time has come to articulate this ultimate experience explicitly, since the process has gone through stages:

Teaching you first to gnaw away on the naked, blind awareness of yourself until by spiritual perseverance you acquired an ease in this interior work; I knew it would prepare you to experience the sublime knowledge of God's being. And ultimately, in this work, that must be your single abiding desire: the longing to experience only God. (P.C. p. 171)

In the beginning of the counsel it revealed its true intentions and its true nature to initiate the reader into contemplation and now again it is transparent in its own way, which is the way of real love:

For this is the way of all real love. The lover will utterly and completely despoil himself of everything, even his very self, because of the one he loves. (P.C. p. 172)

It is a permanent state of affairs and to legitimate its nature the counsel reveals its identity:

This is the meaning of our Lord's words: "Anyone who wishes to love me let him forsake himself". It is as if he were to say: "A man must despoil himself of his very self if he sincerely desires to be clothed in me, for I am the full flowing garment of eternal and unending love." (P.C. p. 172)

The counsel is the full flowing garment of eternal and unending love. The counsel is not only moved by love, it is love itself. It is an eternal and unending lovingly counsel. Though it does understand the hardships of the

reader, it stimulates the reader to persevere and rely on it even though the reader might discover that it might not fully succeed since the elemental sense of her blind being remains between her and God. One's being will remain between him/her and God.

The counsel wants one to desire to love the knowledge and experience of self. This does not mean that the counsel proposes one to 'un-be' (See The Mystical Dynamics of *The Book of Privy Counseling*), since that is even blasphemy against God, but it wants one to lose the knowledge and experience of self:

This is essential if you are to experience God's love as fully as possible in this life. For whatever you are, in whatever you do, or howsoever you try, that elemental sense of you own blind being will remain between you and your God. (P.C. p. 173)

The elemental sense of her blind being will remain between man and God and this painful cross of self, has to be taken up so that the promise of revelation will be fulfilled:

"Let a man first take up his cross" (the painful cross of self) that afterward he may "follow me into glory" or, as we might say, "to the mount of perfection". But listen to his promise: "There I will let him savour the delight of my love in the unspeakable experience of my divine person." See how necessary it is to bear this painful burden, the cross of self. It alone will prepare you for the transcendent experience of God as he is and for union with him in consummate love. (P.C. p. 173)

The promise of resurrection will be fulfilled if one is prepared to take up the cross of self, the cross of humanity which stand in between, and come after him who took up his cross relying on it that this was the way up to union with his Father in consummate love. The counsel shows its living example to convince one of its divine Truth.

If one is able and prepared to take up the cross of self it will prepare one for the transcendent experience of God, (who is our being), as he is and for union with God in consummate, absolute perfect love. This is Grace and this Grace includes a promise:

As this Grace Touches and calls you, may you see and appreciate more and more the surpassing worth of the contemplative work. (P.C. p. 173)

The counsel lovingly hopes for a touch of Grace to stimulate insight into the excellent value of contemplative work. The counsel is lovingly concerned with its receivers and desires its reader to be touched and called by Grace and as it will the counsel prays for more so that the reader will appreciate the surpassing (ultimate value) worth of the contemplative work.

To successfully accomplishing the challenge of going down into the deepest point of her mind, the naked awareness, as “the highest human wisdom”, is comfortably embraced by the counsel which stimulates the reader to forget and forgive her misery and sinfulness to head for the simple elemental level on which one is as she is. Here the reader is sustained to feel completely accepted as the one who *is* as she is, assuming that one has been:

duly absolved of your sins, general and particular, as Holy Church requires
(P.C. p. 153)

The reader and all the others who may be involved in this counsel are assumed to have been duly absolved of sins or any shortcomings in the general or personal particular sense. Here the purification process has been explicitly articulated and initiated, so that the next step can be taken to discern the spirits.

To enter the process of purification a growing awareness of discerning between the work of God and the work of man is vital. One should solve the confusion between one’s own accomplishments and God’s workings. The discernment of one’s own spirit and God’s spirit is the central core of the purification process in which the main issue will always be: who is the centre of Being? God or one’s own self?

5.4 Mystagogic implications of the discernment of spirits

The reader can doubt, ask questions and test. Therefore the process of detecting deceptions and illusions can begin in the second stage: the discernment of spirits.

One of the first deceptions may be the idea of losing the distinction between oneself and God. Therefore the counsel warns the reader:

*Yet keep in mind this distinction between yourself and him: he is your being but you are not his.*³⁵⁵

God alone is his own cause and his own being and the being of everything that exists. God is wholly separate and distinct from every created thing. This is a fundamental distinction which supplies extra security to the reader's faith, since God is eternally present in mankind, even when one does not recognize this as such. Therefore it is fundamental to rely on this truth expressed by the counsel that God is cause and being, not only of everything that exists, but He is *your* cause and *your* being. This is close and direct.

However, the reader tries to find logical reasons to discuss the truth of the counsel, questioning and testing it, but the reader is called back to continue reading:

*And since this is so, let Grace unite your thought and affection to him, while you strive to reject all minute inquiry into the particular qualities of your blind being or of his. Leave your thought quite naked, your affection uninvolved and your self simply as you are, so that Grace may touch and nourish you with the experimental knowledge of God as he really is.*³⁵⁶

The “fact” that God is the being of all, which is being stressed by the words “since this is so”, is presented in such a self-confident way that the reader finds no room to doubt the truth of the counsel. In this logic the reader is assumed to admit Grace to unite her thought and affection to him rejecting minute research into details of her own or God's being, so that one admits Grace to feed one with the experimental knowledge of God as he really is. This experimental knowledge should be convincing since here the reader is

³⁵⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 150

³⁵⁶ Idem, p. 151

being confronted with experience and experience leaves room for evidence and evidence may be convincing.

Even if the reader has willingly yielded the blind awareness of the self to God, this spiritual process is a hard one if one admits disturbing factors to interfere, since they draw one away from God.

In the chaotic turmoil the reader has to be faithfully directed and should not yield to all the distractions, plagues and miseries. This is hard labour since it tears apart and divides. Now, the reader has to stand firm and keep recollected in the deep centre of the spirit:

*not wandering back to working with the faculties under any pretext no matter how sublime. Heed the counsel and instruction which Solomon gave to his son when he said: worship the Lord with your substance and feed the poor with your first fruits. Thus shall your barns be filled with abundance and your presses run over with wine.*³⁵⁷

The reader realises that the counsel works in two ways: from the reader it demands the willingness to remain whole and linger in the deep centre of the spirit resting in God, who in turn will abundantly reward her spiritually. The reader receives abundant evidence to rely on the truthfulness of the counsel. The counsel refers to biblical and other historical authoritative sources to legitimate its discourse, now based on Solomon's allegorical instructions tempting the spiritual desires of the reader to "taste the wine". However, if the reader keeps falling back into the habit of thorough and rational analysis this will only result in a confrontation with one's own self:

*man's refined and exalted qualities (for he is the noblest of all God's creatures), you will come at length to the farthest reaches and ultimate frontiers of thought only to find yourself face to face with naked being itself.*³⁵⁸

If the reader realises that rational analytical research only results in a continuous confrontation with naked existence itself she must take the challenge to leave it and offer it all to God. If the reader is willing to take this step to offer everything to God, it is not only for her own benefit; it is also helpful for the fellow Christians and the self. It is helpful for the whole existence to radiate God's presence:

³⁵⁷ Idem, p. 155

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

*That which I am and the way that I am, with all my gifts of nature and Grace, you have given to me, O Lord, and you are all this. I offer it all to you, principally to praise you and to help my fellow Christians and myself.*³⁵⁹

The counsel can continually supply new eternal evidence to convince the reader, but it will be in vain as long as the reader is not willing to offer her awareness of the blind being to God. Though it may be too simple for the educated mind, which has lost its first primary existential connection, the counsel just requires contemplation.

The self is a cross and, as the counsel argues, one has to take up his/her cross, which is the self, and follow Him who took up his cross to open the divine way to God for all those who willingly want(ed) to follow him. This is one example of how the counsel relates its teachings to the Scripture in order to show its own roots.

The Counsel verifies its truth with the authority of the Scriptures, the example of Christ, and the scrutiny of sound logic to feed the hunger for evidence.³⁶⁰ This is relevant to the reader who is not only given the chance to research her own logic but also to learn more and more about the scriptures and other historical sources supplying a rich spiritual tradition embracing this counsel. All the way through the counsel the reader is assured of the fact that she does not stand alone in this tradition.

The reader's awareness of being involved in the discernment of spirits means a continuous struggling confrontation with dilemmas with which she is faced. One of the dilemmas is the confrontation with the distinction between 'salvation' and 'perfection'.³⁶¹ Remaining outside in active prayer leads to salvation. Entering inside into contemplation leads to perfection. The reader must tune in and make a distinction: is she called to remain outside in active meditation and prayer going for salvation or is she called to turn inward to go for contemplative perfection? The counsel shows the way to both, however it stimulates and draws its reader to the most challenging part: contemplation! Salvation is good, perfection is better. The reader should go for perfection in which both; interiorly realising the repose of abiding in God's love and exteriorly radiating God's love in one's dealings with fellow human beings. In Solomon's counsel, in Proverbs,³⁶² the two ways come together:

³⁵⁹ Idem, p. 156

³⁶⁰ Idem, p. 157

³⁶¹ Idem, p. 177

³⁶² Proverbs 3:13-14, 21-26

I tell you, that if you keep this law of love and this life giving counsel, it really will be your spirit's life, as Solomon says. Interiorly, you will know the repose of abiding in God's love. Exteriorly, your whole personality will radiate the beauty of his love, for with unfailing truth, it will inspire you with the most appropriate response in all your dealings with your fellow Christians. And on these two activities (the interior love for God and the outward expression of your love in relating to others) depend the whole law and the prophets as the Scriptures say. Then as you become perfect in the work of love, both within and without, you will go on your way securely grounded in Grace (your guide in this spiritual journey) lovingly offering your blind, naked being to the glorious being of your God. Though they are distinct by nature, Grace has made them one.³⁶³

In this promise the reader can become completely convinced and transformed and reshaped through this counsel which will be the life of her spirit, completely both internally lingering in God's love and externally radiating this divine loving truth. And then, when the reader has become perfectly drenched in this divine dimension interiorly and exteriorly one can confidently proceed grounded in Grace. It is Grace, which is our guide in this spiritual journey that enables us to offer our blind naked being to the being of God. And be aware: human nature is different from God's but Grace makes them one. This is really the summmum: even though human nature is different from God's nature, Grace makes them one! On the one hand one needs to be aware of the discernment between human nature and God's nature. On the other hand Grace makes them One.

This state of being is so divine that the reader does not need so much more support anymore and the work becomes a habit:

This interior work becomes a spiritual habit; you will not easily be enticed or led away from it by the meddlesome queries of your natural faculties, though in the beginning it was difficult to resist them. We might express the same thing like this: "Then the foot of your love shall neither stumble nor fall on any sort of illusion arising from the insatiable seeking of your faculties".³⁶⁴

The reader has become a more mature contemplative who does not allow interferences so much anymore, since the inquisitive seeking is being more and more rejected and forgotten and the mature contemplative reader does

³⁶³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, pp. 161 and 162

³⁶⁴ Idem, p. 162

not allow the human liability of falsehood contaminate the naked awareness of her own blind being. The reader does not admit the daily activities drawing her away from the dignity of this work.³⁶⁵ The other way around: this spiritual work is not rival to daily activities:

*For with your attention centred on the blind awareness of your naked being united to God's, you will go about your daily rounds, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, going and coming, speaking and listening, lying down and rising up, standing and kneeling, running and riding, working and resting. In the midst of it all, you will be offering to God continually each day the most precious gift you can make. This work will be at the heart of everything you do, whether active or contemplative.*³⁶⁶

The reader can always linger in the embracing presence of God to whom she offers the naked awareness of being, doing the simple work of exercising the full awareness of her naked being and offering it at the same time. Just Be! And not only just be, but offering it to God continually in the midst of everything.

As already stated previously, there has been enough struggle so far! The reader is ready for the next step: to surrender to God in contemplation. Until now it has been premature to take this step, since until now it has been necessary to exercise in forgetting everything except the blind awareness of her naked being so that one is firmly grounded in her naked being. Therefore the counsel has supported the reader to climb step by step towards a high spiritual awareness of her own being and God's being.

So, now time has come to forget even this, to forget even the awareness of her naked being and offer it to God:

*But now I want you to understand that although in the beginning I told you to forget everything save the blind awareness of your naked being, I intended all along to lead you eventually to the point where you would forget even this, so as to experience only the being of God. It was with an eye to this ultimate experience that I said in the beginning: God is your being.*³⁶⁷

The indication that God *is* her being confronts the reader with the close presence of God within her and though this has been stated earlier in the counsel, since the counsel is a circular process in which matters are being

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Idem, p. 171

discussed several times over and over, the reader has now come to a point where no “escape” is suitable anymore: God *Is* our being. God is not only within my being, God *Is* my being. This initiation into the awareness of her (naked) being as God’s being is becoming inescapably effective now.

Now the divine Counsel and the reader have become more and more one unity since the Counsel and the reader, in their circular process, go forward and backward, proceed and go back to the beginning in which the mind which sees and experiences God as he is, is no more separate from him than God is from his own being. Like God, who is one in His own Being, the reader is one with her being, which is God’s Being.

They are one in essence and nature. This counts for both, the Counsel and the reader. The Counsel does not only reflect on its way, but it also reflects on its intentions and it has revealed its strategy as promised in the beginning to ‘my dear friend in God’ who knows. Both, the counsel and the reader ‘know’ as dear friends in God. The only difference between the two is ‘trust’, the Counsel is sure; the reader needs affirmation to find trust.

This lack of trust is a burden, to the reader, since she is stuck to the self, which is a cross:

*I said that you must desire to lose the knowledge and experience of self. This is essential if you are to experience God’s love as fully as possible in this life. You must realise and experience for yourself that unless you lose self you will never reach your goal. For wherever you are, in whatever you do, or howsoever you try, that elemental sense of your blind being will remain between you and your God. It is then that you will realise how heavy and painful the burden of self is. May Jesus help you in that hour, for you will have great need of him.*³⁶⁸

Here the reader is in a hell, which is her own self. The counsel describes this ultimate crisis as follows:

*All the misery in the world taken together will seem as nothing beside this, because then you will be a cross to yourself.*³⁶⁹

This cross of self can only be transformed by taking up the cross of self and go through humanity “*to the mount of perfection*”.³⁷⁰ Taking up (the cross

³⁶⁸ Idem, p. 173

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

of) the self is the only way to prepare for '*the transcendent experience of God as he is and for the union with him in consummate love*'.³⁷¹

It is the mount of perfection on which man and God unite. And here, in this promise, the reader tastes the experience of Jesus Christ who wants to take all, who are willing to follow him, along on his cross. However, though Jesus takes all on his cross, he demands man to go through the human critical experience and taking up his own cross to follow him. Jesus Christ took up his cross and he demands his fellow humans to take up their own cross. The reader has to take up her own cross, which is the self, to follow Him. He set the example and everyone can follow him into glory or '*to the mount of perfection*'.³⁷²

*There I will let him savour the delight of my love in the unspeakable experience of my divine person.*³⁷³

This is the promise for the transcendent experience of God and man. And, if this Grace of the transcendent experience touches and calls:

*May you see and appreciate more and more the surpassing worth of the contemplative work.*³⁷⁴

To achieve this, the counsel carefully keeps track with its reader, who is liable of being deceived or of deceiving the self, since the distinction between God's ways and human ways is not always clear. Therefore the counsel continually illustrates the discernment of spirits by supplying examples, e.g.:

*Notice that I said of myself and not of my activities. Many people confuse their activities with themselves; believe them to be the same. But this is not so. The doer is one thing and his deeds are another. Likewise, God, as he is in himself, is quite distinct from his works which are something else again.*³⁷⁵

This is one example of how to distinguish and discern the spirits. Later on the counsel will also explain the distinction between Grace and the tokens of Grace.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

The reader has to make the switch from active spiritual ascesis, like praying, or discursive meditating to a contemplative attitude to give room to God and this can be a painful process since not only self-deception may ask its price, the self can be a crossing burden as well:

*The simple awareness of my being is all I desire, even though it must bring with it the painful burden of self and make my heart break with weeping because I experience only self and not God.*³⁷⁶

The counsel comforts, stimulates, but also warns, tests and shapes its reader. It helps its reader to make the rights distinctions and become subtle in its atmosphere so that one knows when it is God or when it is the self, or when one is actively busy outside or contemplatively inside:

*Believe me; whoever will not journey by this path will go astray. One must remain outside contemplation, occupied in discursive meditation, even though he would prefer to enter into the contemplative repose beyond them. Many mistakenly believe they have passed within the spiritual door when, in reality, they are still outside it.*³⁷⁷

The discernment between asceticism and contemplation is being sharply emphasised to be sure of a right understanding of one state of being:

*Many mistakenly believe that they have passed within the spiritual door when, in reality, they are still outside it. What is more, they shall remain outside until they learn to seek the door in humble love. Some find the door and enter within sooner than others, not because they possess a special admittance or unusual merit, but simply because the porter chooses to let them in.*³⁷⁸

The mystical tension between active direction and passive reception, between self-initiatives, self-reliance toward reliance and trust in God remains point of attention, since contemplation cannot be achieved by self-initiative or self-reliance. Contemplation has to be granted, like the entrance through the door has to be granted by the porter, who is Christ.

Then a new tension arises: Christ is not only the porter. He is the door as well. Entering not only means: being admitted by the porter who is God, but also entering through the door who is Christ. Man enters through Christ into the realms of the Holy Spirit, which is a “delightful place”:

³⁷⁶ Idem, p. 174

³⁷⁷ Idem, pp. 174 and 175

³⁷⁸ Idem, p. 175

*And oh, what a delightful place is this household of the spirit! Here the Lord himself is not only the porter but the door. As God, he is the porter; as man, he is the door.*³⁷⁹

Here, the Counsel represents God, the Holy Spirit and the Son (Jesus Christ). The reader is admitted entrance into the holy trinity of which she becomes part. A delightful promise, but again: be careful since if one does not go through the doorway of Christ in humility, one will go off stray:

*I am the door of the sheepfold he that enters by me shall be saved. He shall go in and go out and find pastures. He that enters not through the door but climbs up another way. The same is a thief and a robber.*³⁸⁰

God determines who may enter, when and how, but at the same time God clothed himself in an ordinary human nature and utterly available so that no one has an excuse from entering because one would not know the way. God is the door as a human and this means that those who follow him and come in as a human can and may safely enter. It is required to follow the common way by meditating on the Passion of Christ and to learn to say sorry, to apologize for the personal sins which caused that Passion. Christ suffered because of the sin of humanity, not for his own sins. Therefore it is vital to apologize and be sorry, grieving over ones sins.

Remaining outside to nourish the health of the spirit and be brought to salvation or going inside into contemplation to find perfection is not an issue, as far as devotion is concerned, as long as one treads the common clear path. Whether one remains outside meditating or enters within contemplation one

*Shall find the spiritual pastures of devotion in abundance.*³⁸¹

As soon as one has found the door, one has to choose: wait and not go in or act. One has to wait until his conscience and his spiritual father agree that the rust of her “corroded spirit” has been rubbed away:

But most of all, he must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within. This secret invitation from God’s Spirit is the most

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ John 10

³⁸¹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p.176 and John 10: 9

*immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing a person to a higher life of Grace in contemplation.*³⁸²

If the reader is still not convinced now, the counsel continues to exert itself to keep the reader motivated and inspired. The reader remains struggling, even if she sees and realises the eternal value of the contemplative work, which exceeds every work that can be imagined. This work is beyond imagination, of which the reader is aware of in the same way as the counsel is aware of it. However, the self is so strong that it will hardly yield. Therefore the counsel challenges the reader by asking the question to convince her of its truth:

*Tell me now; do you still expect your faculties to help you reach contemplation? Believe me, they will not.*³⁸³

If the reader has been duly absolved of her sins in the way the Holy Church requires, the counsel approves the reader and anyone else to begin this work *The Book of Privy Counseling*. The reader may still feel:

*the burden of sin and wretchedness so terribly that you are uncertain what is best for yourself, but do as I tell you now.*³⁸⁴

Even though one still carries “the burden of sin and wretchedness” and being uncertain of what is best, one is allowed to start the work under the condition of penitence. This is a relieving thought for the reader who might feel guilty, broken, and impartial and fall short. This brokenness is not an obstacle to start the work.

The work appeals to the reader in two ways: lay God to your sick broken self, just as you are, or in another way:

*Lift up your sick self, just as you are and let your desire reach out to touch the good gracious God, just as he is, for to touch him is eternal health.*³⁸⁵

On the one hand the reader receives and on the other hand the reader acts, like the woman in the Gospel³⁸⁶ who relied on it that she would be healed as soon as she would touch the hem of Christ’s garment. Here lies the promise not only to be healed physically but also spiritually. The reader is safe and can count on recovery as soon as she reaches out to God.

³⁸² Idem, p. 176

³⁸³ Idem, p. 173

³⁸⁴ Idem, p. 153

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Matthew 9:20-22

The closeness of the counsel carries the reader, who can step up bravely, lifting up the sick and broken self, just as one is, to *the gracious God, just as he is.*³⁸⁷

Nothing matters anymore, except you *willingly offer to God that blind awareness of your naked being in joyful love, so that Grace can bind you and make you spiritually one with the precious being of God, simply as he is in himself.*³⁸⁸

The spiritual route is free and open, safely paved for the reader who has the free choice to offer the blind awareness to God so that one can be gracefully bound and be made spiritually one with God's being. It is a matter of free will and this is what the reader must realise and experience.

As already stated, the constant discernment of spirits keeps one alert on the authenticity of the process of counsel and therefore there are constant warnings and articulations of the phenomena. Now it is the distinction between those called to salvation and those called to perfection. One should attend to one's own calling and:

*Not discuss or judge God's design in the lives of others. Do not meddle in his affairs.*³⁸⁹

Without God man can do nothing, good or evil, active or contemplative but in good work man cooperates with God, using common sense:

*God is fully active here also but in a different capacity. Here he consents to the act and assists man through secondary means: the light of Scripture, reliable counsel, and the dictates of common sense, which include the demands of one's state, age, and circumstances in life.*³⁹⁰

This again is a check to discern the spirits when one is involved in daily activities pursuing inspirations, even if they are attractive. One should rationally examine them in the light of the three above mentioned witnesses: the Scripture, reliable counsel and what common sense dictates. The counsel facilitates the reader to recognize both earthly and divine matters. Moreover, the counsel is clear about its universal position stating that when God says:

³⁸⁷ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 153

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Idem, p. 178

³⁹⁰ Idem, p. 179

“Without me you can do nothing” he speaks to everyone, since everyone on earth falls into one of these three groups: sinners, actives, or contemplatives. In sinners he is actively present, permitting them to do as they will; in actives, he is present, permitting and assisting; and in contemplatives, as sole master awakening and leading them in this divine work.³⁹¹

The counsel speaks about “this divine work”, since it is a mystical work, leading one to salvation and perfection, being there for anyone. And now it is important to find out whether one is called to contemplation, since it is important not to be deceived. It is a practical and concrete instruction, or rather: a checklist to determine whether one is a contemplative or not, by determining and describing the interior sign which is a growing desire for contemplation and the exterior sign which manifests itself as a joyful enthusiasm arousing within whenever one reads or hears about contemplation from external origins.

As soon as both signs, the interior and the exterior one, *‘the mounting desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm that seizes you when you read or hear of it meet and become one’³⁹²* one may rely on them as proof that God is calling one to enter within and begin a more intense life of Grace.

Still, the one, who has been called to enter and begin a more intense life of Grace, will be confronted with the loss of the signs:

A day will come when they disappear, leaving you, as it were, barren.³⁹³

It is the spiritual or mystical ocean in which one feels barren, as if one has fallen in between, lost. And now one needs trust and reliance on God who will look after everyone. Here, the counsel is practical and promising in its instructions not to be discouraged and rely on God to act:

For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit³⁹⁴ Here it is crucial to keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Idem, p. 180

³⁹² Idem, p. 183

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Idem, p. 184

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

This is a constant advice from the counsel: to rely on God with all your heart. *God may at times withdraw sweet emotions, joyful enthusiasm, and burning desires but he never withdraws his Grace from those he has chosen, except in deadly sin.*³⁹⁶

The reader has to rely on the promise of the counsel which contains the divine promise of God's eternal presence. Again: it is important to distinguish the deeds from being and therefore it is also necessary to distinguish tokens of Grace from Grace itself, which will never be withdrawn except in case of deadly sin. Grace is so pure and so spiritual that the human senses and emotions are not capable of experiencing it. Therefore, it is not essential to experience the tokens of Grace, since they are not Grace itself.

The counsel teaches the reader to become patient in the absence of favours of Grace so that one can be led to '*the spiritual perfection and union with his will, which is perfect love*'.³⁹⁷

The counsel as an everlasting process comes up with a new issue, stating that only few people being touched and confirmed in the Grace of contemplation, but if the reader thinks she has really experienced the tokens then it is advisable to test oneself against the rigorous criteria of Scripture, spiritual father and her own conscience.

Now the reader is capable of testing herself and be aware of how she can learn to be wholly surrendered to the spiritual awareness of the self *and* God. God and man are two, but One in Spirit.

5.5 Mystagogic implications of surrender

The counsel supports and teaches the reader how to discover and experience God as her Being, as the bearing ground and force.³⁹⁸ In the fundamental awareness of God, as the foundational bearing principle, the reader is trustfully stimulated to go into the counselling process. The counsel, as a spiral, circular process will be lived through over and again, based on the fundamental experience of God as the fundamental dynamic of one's being.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Psalms 31:3-4, 91 and 139

The counsel teaches that from the very beginning man is in God. God is the Being of all. Man was created in God's image to restore God's image. In the restoration man is continually being shaped and reshaped in an everlasting surrendering process. Man has to surrender himself to this restoration process, so that he admits himself being restored in God's image. The way in which the counsel supports this process of restoration, man is being initiated deeper and deeper into God, who eternally shapes and reshapes man towards his own image. Man is called to surrender to this initiation process in order to be restored and become One with God. The purpose of this counselling process is Unity, Oneness in God.

Therefore it is vital to discern the spirits continually in a trustful surrender to the Spirit of the counsel. Without surrender the counselling process cannot bear fruit:

*most of all, he must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within.*³⁹⁹

The divine touch is secretly hidden in the deepest point of the heart. This is the sublime mystical implication of the work of Privy Counseling, since the Spirit is guiding one secretly in the depths of one's heart waiting to stir autonomously, without any human intermittence or interference of the self. The paradox will remain between the Spirit's secret guidance and stirring and the Spirit's invitation as the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and lifting one up to a higher life of Grace in contemplation to which one is invited to surrender.

The counsel has taught the reader how to discern the spirits and how to become patient in the absence of favours of Grace so that one can be led to:

*the spiritual perfection and union with his will, which is perfect love.*⁴⁰⁰

In this perfect love one does not need external or internal signs or affirmation anymore/ (apatheia) one is not heading for external sign of affirmation and one's love has become:

Chaste and perfect. It is then that you will see your God and your love, and being made spiritually one with his love, nakedly experience him at the sovereign point of your spirit... This experience will be blind, as it must be

³⁹⁹ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 177

⁴⁰⁰ Idem, p. 184

*in this life; yet, with the purity of an undivided heart, far removed from all the illusion and error liable to mortal man.*⁴⁰¹

The counsel, as a spiral circular process, goes backward and forward to stimulate and to support the reader in her reconciliation process in which the mind more and more sees and experiences God as He is. God is no more separate from her than He is from his own being. Man and God, are one in essence and nature from the very beginning to the very end. Though, there is no beginning or end, the spirit:

*which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in Grace.*⁴⁰²

Grace means ‘unity’ between man and God, in essence and nature and therefore the spirit which sees and experiences God is united with God through God’s Grace which changes the perspective for the spirit which has come to see and experience through God. It realises its source from which it forms its perspective. It ‘sees’ from the perspective of God, from God’s perspective. It is Grace which unites man with and in God, so much that man is One with God. However, creator and creation do not completely assimilate, but they are one in Being and united in Love.

In his counsel, the author sets Jesus Christ as the most striking example of how to see and experience through God and how to surrender to God’s seeing and experiencing. Without surrender it is not possible to come to the pure spiritual divine experience of loving Christ and one’s own humanity in God:

*Christ ascended to heaven to show that a higher perfection was possible to man in this life: the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead.*⁴⁰³

The counsel teaches the reader to follow Christ’s example in her surrender. Christ gave up his physical presence for mankind and for man’s own good, since without complete surrender it is not possible to enter into Unity:

*It is necessary for you that I go.*⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ Idem, p. 186

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Idem, p. 187

⁴⁰⁴ John 16.7

Now it is the turn for the reader to realise the counsel in surrender. To emphasise its experiential, traditional truth the counsel does not only refer to the Scriptures, but also to St. Augustine who stated:

*'Were not the form of his humanity withdrawn from our bodily eyes, love for him in his Godhead would never cleave to our spiritual eyes'.*⁴⁰⁵

In his surrender, Jesus Christ showed his own divinity. This quotation shows that this counsel stands in an everlasting mystical tradition moving its reader not only in the past, but nowadays as well, showing its eternal existence in which man and God linger.

The reader realises that she is related to God, even spiritually united to God, and therefore God works in two ways to teach patience and persistence in times of doubt or desolation when signs of Grace are lacking:

*on the one hand you learn patience in their absence (signs of Grace) and on the other you grow strong with the life-giving, loving food they provide in their coming. Thus our Lord fashions you by both until you become so joyfully supple and so sweetly pliable that he can lead you at last to the spiritual perfection and union with his will, which is perfect love. Then you will be as willing and content to forego all feelings of consolation, when he judges best, as to enjoy them unceasingly.*⁴⁰⁶

The reader is challenged to subtleness, to become as supple as a glove on God's hands united with God's will, which is perfect love. Then the reader becomes more and more stable in her faith, trust, not worrying about God's absence or God's presence, finally to come to the spiritual perfection and union of God's will.

In times of suffering the desolating experience of God as absent, the reader is challenged to surrender in trust. This experience of desolation is a meaningful experience and it teaches the reader how to go along with God's movements of absence or presence so that she becomes subtle, flexible and detached. As a consequence:

*Your love becomes both chaste and perfect. It is then that you will see your God and your love, and being made spiritually one with his love, nakedly experience him at the sovereign point of your spirit.*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 187

⁴⁰⁶ Idem, p. 185

⁴⁰⁷ Idem, p. 186

Despite the desolated experiences, the counsel leads the reader to the awareness that God is never absent, since the reader is spiritually united with and in God's love at the sovereign point of her spirit. Even though the naked awareness or experience is blind:

*with the purity of an undivided heart, far removed from all the illusion and error liable to mortal man you will perceive and feel that it is mistakenly he, as he really is.*⁴⁰⁸

The reader and the counsel both realise and come to the awareness that it is unmistakably He, as He really is. This naked, pure aware experience is clear and pure if the heart is undividedly surrendered. Then:

*the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which is one in essence and nature.*⁴⁰⁹

Here, the counsel of the discernment of spirits, the condition for Being and the ultimate surrender come together proclaiming that the reader's mind which perceives and experiences God as God is in his divine naked, pure reality is as close to God as she is to her own being. Even more: God's being and her own being are one in essence and nature. Even though they are separate, they are one in essence (spirit) and one in nature (image). It is not stated that they are one, but they are very close and one in essence and nature.

The counsel expresses its realisation that imagination and reason have taught all they can it is high time for the reader to:

*learn to be wholly given to the simple spiritual awareness of yourself and God.*⁴¹⁰

It is a complete surrender to the naked spiritual awareness of the self and God. Two entities united in spiritual union. This is not only an imagination it is a complete original awareness. It is a divine awareness in a spiritual togetherness in which God and man are united in One Spirit.

To show its immense torturing subtle hardship the counsel expresses its understanding for the reader's despair of how the reader can endure this

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

process, since life is so vivid and full of turmoil, the faculties demanding attention and diverting the reader from this work and still:

*the spirit rests in a freedom from doubt and anxiety about what it must do... since it knows and it is secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err.*⁴¹¹

Despite the convincing counsel, the reader remains inclined to cling on to the self and tries to imagine the contemplative process, but imagination will not bring contemplation. The reader realises more and more that the simple awareness of being and then offering it to God in complete surrender is the way to union. Therefore it is fundamental to give in to the desire to come to the naked awareness of her being, even if it confronts one with the painful burden of the self, which is a torture, but it is preferable to all the fantasies or theories, since it opens the everlasting desire to experience God.

In this process the counsel and the reader are one. They have become One. The counsel starts speaking of "I" and "myself", setting its way as an example:

*The simple awareness of my being is all I desire, even though it must bring with it the painful burden of self and make my heart break with weeping because I experience only self and not God. I prefer it with its pain to all the subtle or unusual thoughts and ideas of man may speak of or find in books. For this suffering will set me on fire with the loving desire to experience God as he really is.*⁴¹²

Does the reader need more examples to be convinced of the eternal value of this work so that she can trustfully surrender?

Now the Counsel has set itself an example by articulating its own experiences, feelings and view on this contemplative process. Now the reader is standing on her own self, next to the Counsel, however, still being tempted by the process itself to proceed. Both the Counsel and reader have become one process which proceeds, surrendering their own selves to it, to God.

The experiential level in the counsel is very important, in such a way that the reader is not only attracted by the words of the counsel, but also by the transient experiences that shine through them and find their resonance in

⁴¹¹ Idem, p. 188

⁴¹² Idem, p. 174

the reader, e.g. the exalting expression of the counsel to joyfully celebrate the ‘household of the spirit’, into which both the counsel and reader are being initiated to take part in:

*And oh, what a delightful place is this household of the spirit! Here, the Lord himself is not only the porter but the door. As God, he is the porter; as man, he is the door.*⁴¹³

Jesus Christ, as the son of God, has incarnated into humanity and he has gone through humanity into divinity through the Holy Spirit. For this counselling process this means that the reader is invited to go through humanity heading on to divinity in the realms of the Holy Spirit. Through the spirit the author invites the reader to take part and linger in this household of the spirit in the Counsel.

This delightful promise, emphasised by the counsel, sets the reader in the desirable motion to trust the spirit, which runs such a delightful place of which Jesus Christ is not only the entrance and opening, but he is the porter as well. Jesus, as the porter opens the door to the household of the Holy Spirit, but he is also the door to the household of the spirit. The counsel, being the representative of Christ, is both the door and the porter. As the porter the counsel opens the door for the reader to enter this delightful household of the spirit. Through Jesus Christ it is God who opens the (household of the) Holy Spirit to the reader to enter. Through the Counsel it is the Author who, as the representative of God, embraces, invites and leads the reader into the delightful household of the Holy Spirit.

In the Holy Spirit one will find pastures.⁴¹⁴ The reader goes into contemplation through the Holy Spirit and goes out meditating to find pastures, a metaphor also used in Psalm 23:

*in the place of pasture there he hath set me. He nourished me on the water of refreshing; (he hath set me in a place of pasture. He nourished me by the waters of refreshing;) He converted my soul. He led me forth on the paths of rightfulness; for his name. (he transformed my soul).*⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Idem, p. 175

⁴¹⁴ Psalm 23

⁴¹⁵ Psalm 23: *He led me forth on the paths of righteousness/on the right paths; for the sake of his name. For why though I shall go in the midst of shadow of death; I shall not dread evils, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff; those have comforted me. (For though I go in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me.)*⁵ *Thou hast made ready a board in my sight; against them that trouble me. Thou hast made fat mine head with oil; and my cup, that filleth greatly, is full clear. (Thou hast prepared a table before me; before those who trouble me. Thou hast covered my head with oil;*

The reader realises that it is God who has made room in the soul for the Holy Spirit to dwell within her. It is God who will grant entrance and now it is really time again to surrender and to step into the household of the spirit as soon as entrance is granted. It is a two sided incidence in which God and man interact: God admitting entrance and man stepping in having gone through humanity into divinity by God in God, through the door.

Now the counsel shows how the reader has become sharply and purely undividedly sensitive to the Holy Spirit guiding her deeply and secretly, though clearly and differently Aware. The entrance admitted supplies a new dimension to the spiritual awareness of the reader. This new Awareness is receptive of the spiritual pastures that nourish it in a growing authentic trust.

This authentic trust is delicate, since it is vital for the reader to remain purely undivided present in trust. It is a growing process of developing trust. Therefore it has to be pure and authentic.

The reader realises that dwelling in authentic trust is yielding to the counsel in its infinite circular guidance. The counsel will constantly feed the reader with new dimensions in its teaching to draw her to a higher life of Grace in contemplation:

*Most of all, he must be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within. This secret invitation from God's Spirit is the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing a person to a higher life of Grace in contemplation.*⁴¹⁶

The spirit has incarnated in the counselling process, which is an everlasting process like the household of the Holy Spirit with its everlasting infinite pastures. The reader grows in flexibility in going in and going out, relying on the Process itself, being the process, growing towards perfection.

The reader learns how to go straight onward, even if the counsel shows its polarities, such as the distinction between those who are called to salvation and those called to its perfection. It is not up to anyone to determine which

*and my cup, which thou greatly filleth, is full, indeed it runneth over.)*⁶ *And thy mercy shall follow me; in all the days of my life.* And that I dwell in the house of the Lord; into the length of days. (And thy love shall follow me; all the days of my life. And I shall live in the House of the Lord forever and ever)

⁴¹⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 177

way to go, since God determines whether one is determined to salvation or perfection. Be at peace with your calling, since:

*Without me you can do nothing.*⁴¹⁷

No one can ever tell God what to do and the reader realises that the contemplative way is the way of the Counsel. Going into contemplation and going out for meditation, finding pastures relying on God in his eternal Counsel, realizing that:

*In all that touches contemplation, even the loftiest human wisdom must be rejected. For here God alone is the chief worker and he alone takes the initiative, while man consents and suffers his divine action.*⁴¹⁸

God is with mankind in everything, in good and bad, whatever one chooses: in good actions he assists to great merit if one should advance, to shame if one falls back. However, in contemplation God takes the complete initiative:

*First to awaken us, and then, as a master craftsman, to work in us, leading us to the highest perfection by uniting us spiritually to himself in consummate love.*⁴¹⁹

The reader is well aware of the divine workings; the realisation of God working in us is already a fact from the Beginning. The reader realises that God is working in her and she also becomes more and more aware of how God leads her to perfection by uniting the reader to Himself. The reader is being united to God who is leading her to perfection. The spiritual union of uniting the reader to God Himself in consummate love is the way in which God leads the reader to perfection. This means that the reader is more and more united to God in absolute love and stimulated to grow in perfection in this divine work realizing that without God no one can do anything.

Referring to the first quotation in this paragraph: ‘*most of all man should be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within*

⁴²⁰ it can be stated that the Spirit has incarnated in the Counsel, which has entered into God’s deepest secret.

⁴¹⁷ Idem, p. 178

⁴¹⁸ Idem, p. 179

⁴¹⁹ Idem, p. 180

⁴²⁰ Idem, p. 177

All has become One. The entrance admitted into God's deepest secret is the sublime invitation to everyone willing to authentically undividedly surrender in reading the Counsel.

In short: as already stated at the beginning, mystagogy involves the process of guiding and initiating the reader into the mystical realms of contemplation through three phases: the mystical implications of being, the discernment of spirits and surrender. As the mystagogy is a relational process between the counsel and the reader the three phases have been enlightened through the perspective of the counsel and through the perspective of the reader.

The counsel draws the reader into its own spiritual dominion first by having the reader release everything except her naked awareness of her own being and to concentrate on *that* one is. Soon when the reader has come aware of her naked self being the counsel warns that the reader should keep in mind the distinction between her self and God, who is man's being, but man is not God's being. This is the phase of the discernment of spirits. Finally the counsel draws its reader into complete surrender in which he learns to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding her secretly in the depths of her heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons from within.⁴²¹

The awareness of the Counsel being the divine representation of God's Spirit is the most challenging conviction for the reader to surrender to contemplation.

The Spirit has incarnated in the Counsel, which has entered into God's deepest secret. In the surrender to contemplation the Holy Spirit has incorporated in the reader.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

6. Conclusions

In this research two layers or dimensions of communication have been investigated. A profound insight in the superficial explicit communicative layer is a necessary requirement to reveal the deeper dimension. On the surface layer the counsel is explicitly mentioned and described but it is the deep spiritual dimension which really speaks to the reader. This has been the focus of attention within this research, taking into consideration that the counsel fundamentally communicates in the spiritually deeper layer.

The mystical dynamic and the narrative dynamic reading show how the counsel gradually transforms into a Divine Counsel in which God himself relates to the monk-narrator, the I person, to the implied reader and therefore to the real reader as well. In other words: first, the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader becomes explicit and in due course this relationship gradually transforms into a divine relationship showing how God wants to be involved.

To show how this process unfolds itself, the research has taken the following steps:

Firstly, the research has focused on a hermeneutic mystical dynamic reading, describing the mystical communicative relationship between the monk and the novice. Through that relationship the research has described the relationship between the (implied) author and the (implied) reader. The research has demonstrated how those relationships are interrelated, the author's intentions have been analysed and investigated. From the results of the close reading it is possible to interpret the counsel. On the surface level/layer the monk communicates with the novice in order to make it possible that both can become conscious that God speaks to both the author and the reader on the deeper spiritual level.

Hermeneutics is being understood as the 'most essential level of close reading'.⁴²² In the spiritual hermeneutic reading the research comes to the core, the deeper meaning, of the text.⁴²³

In this research the monastic hermeneutic reading approach, or the 'lectio divina', has been applied in an actualized appropriate way to get a fundamental understanding of how God works in *The Book of Privy*

⁴²² Waaijman, K. *Spirituality Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 412

⁴²³ Idem, p. 704

Counseling. It has been carried out scientifically and methodologically to reveal the deeper dimension of the text. It is a method which can be applied to various kinds of literary texts to reveal the deeper dimensions of texts.

Secondly, by the application of the hermeneutic narrative approach the research has attempted to get a grasp on the narrative structure. After uncovering the relationships within *The book of Privy Counseling*, it has indeed turned out that it is possible to investigate the narrative dynamical linguistic nature of the communication within this book. This has been carried out through a narrative analysis, based on criteria for narrative dynamical reading according to Tolmie's and Chatman's theories.⁴²⁴ Following Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's anthropological theories three phases of separation, transition and incorporation are indicated.⁴²⁵ These steps are similar to the steps taken by the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* which accompanies its novice-reader into contemplation.

It is the narrative dynamic process which draws the parties involved into the deeper layers of spiritual mystical being.

Thirdly, through the mystical and narrative dynamical readings the inner logic of the Counsel has been revealed to the reader. Through the reading process the reader becomes more and more aware of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. This process consists of subsequent steps in a circular movement. The Counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within the Book of Privy Counseling the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the Counsel and from the perspective of the reader. The research has dealt with the three stages seen from both perspectives.

The articulation of the mystical implication creates the possibility to learn how the reader can be involved in the mystical dynamic process.

The counsel draws the reader into its own spiritual dominion first by having the reader release everything except her naked awareness of her own being and to concentrate on *that* one is. In the phase of the discernment of spirits the counsel warns that the reader should keep in mind the distinction between her self and God. Finally the counsel draws its reader into

⁴²⁴ Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, San Francisco – London – Bethesda, 1999, and Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca and London, 1978

⁴²⁵ Turner, V. *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti- Structure*, University of Virginia, New York 1969 and Gennep, v. A. 'The rites of passage', London and Henley, 1960

complete surrender in which she learns to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding her secretly in the depths of her heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons from within.⁴²⁶

The awareness of the Counsel being the divine representation of God's Spirit is the most challenging conviction for the reader to surrender to contemplation.

It can be concluded that by articulating and revealing mystical processes within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the research offers possibilities to come into the position of forming a method of revealing mystical narrative dynamical elements in other mystical works. Moreover, it may contribute to reveal dynamics in current counselling situations.

The uniqueness, or the distinctiveness, of *The Book of Privy Counseling* being literally an explicit way of counselling opens new ways of stating that this way of counselling is a form of spirituality in itself.

⁴²⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 177

Summary

As far as known, *The Book of Privy Counseling* is the first written explicit and formal counselling work of Western literature. In medieval times from the 12th century on, particularly in the 14th century, people started to write in the vernacular. From now on not only clerics were in a position to achieve spiritual growth and perfection through reading mystical literature, but also laymen became able to read the mystical works in their own language as well.

It is assumed that the anonymous author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* composed four original treatises and three translations: *The Epistle of Prayer*; *the Epistle of Discretion*; *Hid Divinity*; *Benjamin Minor*; *The Study of Wisdom*; *A treatise of Discerning of Spirits*; *The Cloud of Unknowing* and finally *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The Book of Privy Counseling is an existential counsel written by an author, who has gone through the mystical process himself. In this counsel he leads his novice to spiritual union and enlightenment.

The Book of Privy Counseling is practical. It guides the reader in the path of contemplation. It teaches the contemplative prayer that goes beyond thought and imagery into the supra conceptual cloud of unknowing.⁴²⁷ In his rejection of conceptualisation the author is radical: all thoughts, all concepts, all images must be buried beneath a metaphorical “cloud of forgetting”, while our “naked love” (naked because divested of thought) must rise up to God hidden in the “cloud of unknowing”. In a metaphorical sense: with the cloud of unknowing above, between man and God, and the cloud of forgetting below, between man and all creatures, man finds himself in the “silentium mysticum”.⁴²⁸

The author is radical in his rejection of conceptualisation for which he sets the tone already in the first paragraph: “Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil”. ‘God can be loved but he cannot be thought. He can be grasped by love but never by concepts. So: less thinking and more loving.’⁴²⁹ The author guides his novice, driven by love.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* the author speaks of two clear-cut steps on the way to enlightenment:

⁴²⁷ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introduction’ *Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*, Nijmegen 1984, p. 8

⁴²⁸ Idem, p. 9

⁴²⁹ Idem, p. 9

The first step is the rejection of all thoughts about *what I am* and *what God is* in order to be conscious of *that I am* and *that God is*. This is what Johnston calls “existential prayer” because of its abandonment of all essences or modes of being.

The second step is the rejection of all thought and feeling of her own being to be conscious only of the being of God. In this way the author leads to a total self-forgetfulness, a seemingly total loss of self for a consciousness only of the being of him whom we love”.⁴³⁰

This monk has a profound understanding of the human mind, he “knows” the human mind and he is aware of man’s ‘tragic capacity for self-deception and yet endowed with a delicate compassion for those who suffer as they struggle to remain in silent love at the core of their being”.⁴³¹

As Literature research has shown that no concrete steps have been taken to analyse articulated mystical dynamic processes within *The Book of Privy Counseling* and the narrative dynamical communicative relation through which the text of this work moves the reader, the communicative relation between the text and its reader deserves special attention and research since it will contribute to a more profound understanding of which mystical dynamics arise between the author and the reader. Within *The Book of Privy Counseling* not only the communicative relationship between the author and his characters, the monk and the novice, is important but the communicative relationship between the author and the reader plays a significant role in its dynamics as well.

The research into *The Book of Privy Counseling* is focused on analysing the mystical communicative relationships to reveal the internal structure of the book. Through the narrative communicative relationship between the monk and the novice the mystical divine dimension reveals itself. The counsel presents the communication between God and the human soul.

The aim of the research is to contribute to a more profound understanding of which mystical dynamics arise between the author and the reader.

To achieve this aim the object of the research is to reveal the internal structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling* in order to gain a profound understanding of which mystical and narrative dynamics arise between the author and the reader. This research serves a broader and wider scope, since it might offer opportunities to reveal mystical processes. By articulating and revealing mystical processes within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, the

⁴³⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 10
⁴³¹ Ibid

research might come into the position of forming a method of revealing mystical narrative dynamical elements in current counselling situations.

In order to reveal the internal mystical dynamic structure of *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystical communicative relationships between the monk -(implied) author and the novice-(implied) reader on the one hand and on the other hand between the author and the reader have been analysed. In this work there is a communicative relation between a concrete guide/monk who communicates with God and who lets God talk. The novice speaks through the counsellor. The communication between all 'parties' involved reveals the mystical- and narrative dynamical structure. Therefore the main question of the research is as follows:

Which mystical dynamic communicative processes can be distinguished within *The Book of Privy Counseling*?

The research has been carried out both internally, within the text, investigating the communication between the narrating I-person, supposedly personified by the monk and the narratee, supposedly personified by the novice and externally on the communication between the author and the reader.

It is a fundamental condition to analyse the narrative dynamics and to reveal the mystagogic layers within *The Book of Privy Counseling* in order to distinguish the mystical dynamics.

Though the counsel shows a didactic instruction of how to turn inward and how to proceed the process of initiation into the deepest realms of contemplation, it acts as a truly living counsel in which parties, such as the Monk/narrator (the protagonist) and the Novice/narratee (the antagonist), explicitly take part. This lively, explicit narrative communication is placed on the horizontal level or layer of communication.

Besides the communication between the parties involved on the horizontal level, the counsel communicates as an implied author to an implied reader directed by the real author toward the real reader. The latter communication can be indicated as the vertical level or layer of communication. Moreover, the vertical level of communication initiates a transformation from a common counselling to a Divine Counsel revealing the mystical dynamics which go along with the narrative dynamics which transform into mystical narrative dynamics.

The uniqueness of *The Book of Privy Counseling* being literally an explicit way of counselling could open new ways of stating that this way of Counseling is a form of spirituality in itself.

The research also states that by the narrative dynamical reading the mystical dynamics are revealed.

The book of Privy Counseling communicates on two levels, layers or dimensions: on a literary surface level or layer and on a deeper spiritual level or layer. On the surface the communication between the monk-narrator and the novice-narratee, or the protagonist and the antagonist, takes place. It should be noted that the novice, as the antagonist, is known through the monk's tale. In the underlying layer the communication between the implied author and implied reader takes place. Through the deeper layers the counsel spirals down into the depths of the soul of both the (implied) author and the (implied) reader.

According to William Johnston, within these layers of communication the Counsel represents two ways of thinking or mental activities which show themselves in a vertical and a horizontal level: 'the vertical, existential, supra conceptual level, as opposed to the horizontal, essential or conceptual level'.⁴³² The horizontal level or dimension of thinking moves in successive images and it concentrates on *what* a person or thing is, rather than *that* someone or something is and in it the mind is conscious of time and place. 'To this way of thinking belongs logic, reasoning discourse: it is the conceptual process at work in the daily life of everyone. The author uses this way of thinking in his logical exposition of mysticism. The vertical way of thinking does not move in successive images but it spirals down silently into the depth of one's being without concepts, without images, and (at its highest point) without consciousness (of time). This tells *that* reality is rather than *what* it is.'⁴³³ According to Johnston the English writer is 'leading to it when he bids the contemplative not to meditate on the qualities of God, reflecting on *what* He is but simply to hold herself in the existential realisation of the fact *that* God is and *that* I am'.⁴³⁴

In this research the two layers or dimensions of communication have been investigated taking into consideration that the counsel fundamentally communicates in the spiritual deeper layer. However, it needs the superficial explicit communicative layer to reveal the deeper dimension. On the surface layer the counsel is explicitly mentioned and described but it is

⁴³² Johnston, W. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, 2000, pp. 258 and 259

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

the deep spiritual dimension which really speaks to the reader. This is the focus of attention within this research.

Both the mystical dynamic and the narrative dynamic readings show how the counsel gradually transforms into a Divine Counsel in which God himself relates to the monk-narrator, the I person, and to the implied reader and therefore to the real reader as well. In other words: first, the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader becomes explicit and in due course this relationship gradually transforms into a divine relationship showing how God wants to be involved.

To show how this process unfolds itself the research takes the following steps:

Firstly, the research focuses on a hermeneutic mystical dynamic reading, describing the mystical communicative relationship between the monk and the novice. Through that relationship the research describes the relationship between the (implied) author and the (implied) reader. As soon as the research demonstrates how those relationships are interrelated, the author's intentions can be analysed and investigated. The research will be started with a close reading in which the counsel will be interpreted. On the surface level/layer the monk communicates with the novice, in order to make it possible that both can become conscious that God speaks to both the author and the reader.

Secondly, the research has attempted to get a grasp on the narrative structure by applying a hermeneutic narrative approach. After uncovering the relationships within *The book of Privy Counseling*, it is possible to investigate the narrative dynamical linguistic nature of the communication within this book. This is carried out through a narrative analysis, based on criteria for narrative dynamical reading according to Tolmie's and Chatman's theories.⁴³⁵ Following Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's anthropological theories three phases of separation, transition and incorporation are indicated.⁴³⁶

Thirdly, through the mystical and narrative dynamical readings the inner logic of the Counsel will be revealed to the reader. Through the reading process the reader becomes more and more aware of how to go into the

⁴³⁵ Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, San Francisco – London – Bethesda, 1999 and Chatman, S. *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978

⁴³⁶ Turner, V. *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti- Structure*, 1969 and Gennep, v. A. 'The rites of passage' 1960

spiritual contemplative process. This process consists of subsequent steps in a circular movement. The Counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the Counsel and from the perspective of the reader. Therefore this part will deal with the three stages seen from both perspectives. To learn how the reader can be involved in this process the research articulates the mystical implications.

In doing so the research positions itself in the traditions of the monastic hermeneutic reading approach, or the ‘lectio divina’. This monastic hermeneutic reading approach has been applied in an actualized appropriate way to get a fundamental understanding of how God works in *The Book of Privy Counseling*. It has been carried out scientifically and methodologically to reveal the deeper dimension of the text. It is a method which can be applied to various kinds of literary texts to reveal the deeper dimensions of texts.

The research on *The Book of Privy Counseling* has gained the following results:

The results of the mystical dynamic reading

The research has focused on a hermeneutic mystical dynamic reading, describing the mystical communicative relationship between the monk and the novice. Through that relationship the research has described the relationship between the (implied) author and the (implied) reader. The research has demonstrated how those relationships are interrelated, the author’s intentions have been analysed and investigated. From the results of the close reading it is possible to interpret the counsel. On the surface level/layer the monk communicates with the novice in order to make it possible that both can become conscious that God speaks to both the author and the reader on the deeper spiritual level.

Hermeneutics is understood as ‘the most essential level of close reading’.⁴³⁷ In the spiritual hermeneutic reading the research comes to the core, the deeper meaning of the text.⁴³⁸ In other words: hermeneutics has been applied as the

⁴³⁷ Waaijman, K *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 412

⁴³⁸ Idem, p. 704

reading method to get a fundamental understanding of how God works in *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The results of the narrative analysis

The research has applied Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's theories on rites of Passage to reveal the narrative dynamics of *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The research has detected three main narrative dimensions in 'the rites of passage' which are similar to the steps taken by the author of *The Book of Privy Counseling* which accompanies its novice-reader into contemplation:

In the first stage of *separation* the novice must go apart and free the self from fixed concepts, ideas or ways of living or activities, such as meditating upon one's self or ways of introspection to gain self-awareness. In this first phase one has to break down all self-directed concepts to be ready to encounter a new state of being.

In the second stage of *transition* the novice may feel as if being 'in-between' in which she will be totally despoiled of her self and clothed in nothing but Him. (P.C. p. 171) Here one's being is totally stripped of any recognizable image or state of being and finding herself in a liminal state between previous and future identities.⁴³⁹ This stage can be compared to a cloud of Unknowing, a quite darkness before spiritual union with God. In this stage the transformation takes place.

In the final stage of *incorporation* the novice crosses the threshold of contemplation into union. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* this stage opens itself in which the soul finds its rest in a freedom from doubt and anxiety feeling secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err. (P.C. p. 188) Therefore it is vital to discern the spirits.

Throughout the process of initiation the monk remains the monk, however, in the liminal transformation he is completely renewed.

In the final stage of incorporation, within *The Book of Privy Counseling*, it is important to discern the spirits to ensure that the soul "will not greatly err". Therefore, the third step of the narrative dynamic reading, concerning the incorporation, has mainly focused on the discernment of spirits, so that the novice-reader may rely on the ultimate experience:

⁴³⁹ Gennep, v. A. 'The rites of passage', 1960, pp. 20 - 21

Finally, the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which, as we know, is one in essence and nature. For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in grace. (P.C. p. 186)

It can be concluded that it is the narrative dynamic process which draws the parties involved into the deeper layers of spiritual mystical being.

Through the mystical and narrative dynamical readings the inner logic of the counsel has revealed itself to the reader, who has become more and more aware of how to go into the spiritual contemplative process. This process consists of subsequent circular steps in a spiral movement. The counsel takes the reader along in three phases: the mystical implication of being, the mystical implication of discernment of spirits and the mystical implication of surrender. Since the mystagogy is a relational process within *The Book of Privy Counseling* the mystagogic implications can be enlightened from two perspectives: from the perspective of the counsel and from the perspective of the reader.

The counsel draws the reader into its own spiritual dominion first by having the reader release everything except her naked awareness of her own being and to concentrate on *that* she is. In the phase of the discernment of spirits the counsel warns that the reader should keep in mind the distinction between her self and God. Finally the counsel draws its reader into complete surrender in which she learns to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding her secretly in the depths of her heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons from within.⁴⁴⁰

The awareness of the Counsel being the divine representation of God's Spirit is the most challenging conviction for the reader to surrender to contemplation.

The Spirit has incarnated in the Counsel, which has entered into God's deepest secret. In the surrender to contemplation the Holy Spirit has incorporated in the reader.

⁴⁴⁰ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 177

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Voor zover bekend, is *The Book of Privy Counseling*, dat in het Nederlands vertaald kan worden als ‘*Het boek tot inwijding in de contemplatie*’, ook reeds door Herman Servotte vertaald als ‘*Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*’, de eerst geschreven, formele counseling binnen de Westerse literatuur. In de middeleeuwen, vanaf de twaalfde eeuw en vooral in de veertiende eeuw, begonnen mensen te schrijven in de eigen moedertaal. Vanaf die tijd waren het niet enkel de priesters en andere geleerden die in staat waren spirituele groei en perfectie te bereiken door het lezen van mystieke literatuur, maar vanaf nu konden ook leken in hun eigen moedertaal kennis nemen van mystieke werken.

Er wordt vanuit gegaan dat de anonieme schrijver van *The Book of Privy Counseling* vier traktaten heeft samengesteld en drie vertalingen heeft verricht. Hij heeft de volgende werken geschreven: *The Epistle of Prayer*; *the Epistle of Discretion*; *Hid Divinity*; *Benjamin Minor*; *The Study of Wisdom*; *A treatise of Discerning of Spirits*; *The Cloud of Unknowing* en tenslotte *The Book of Privy Counseling*.

The Book of Privy Counseling is een existentiële counsel, geschreven door een auteur die zelf door het mystieke proces is gegaan. In deze counsel begeleidt hij zijn leerling tot spirituele vereniging en verlichting.

The Book of Privy Counseling is praktisch. Het begeleidt de lezer op het pad van de contemplatie. Het leert het contemplatieve gebed dat boven het denken en fantasie uitgaat in de supraconceptuele ‘Wolk van Niet-Weten’.⁴⁴¹ De auteur is radicaal: alle gedachten, alle concepten, alle beelden moeten verborgen worden onder een metaforische “wolk van vergeten”, terwijl onze pure liefde (puur omdat het ontdaan is van gedachten) op moet gaan naar God die verborgen is in ‘de wolk van het niet-weten’. In metaforische zin kan gesteld worden dat: met de wolk van het niet-weten, tussen de mens en God, en de wolk van vergeten, tussen de mens en alle schepselen, de mens zich bevindt in het “silentium mysticum”.⁴⁴²

De auteur is radicaal in zijn afwijzing van conceptualisaties waarvoor hij reeds in zijn eerste paragraaf de toon zet: ‘Wijs alle gedachten af, of ze nu goed zijn of des duivels’, ‘God kan bemind worden, hij kan niet gedacht worden. God kan bevatten worden door liefde, maar nooit door concepten.

⁴⁴¹ Blommestijn, H. ‘Introductie’ *Inwijding in het Ongeweten Weten*, 1984, p. 8

⁴⁴² Idem, p. 9

Daarom: minder redeneringen en meer liefde'.⁴⁴³ De auteur begeleidt zijn leerling uit liefde.

In *The Book of Privy Counseling* spreekt de auteur van twee duidelijke stappen op weg naar verlichting:

De eerste stap is de afwijzing van alle gedachten over *wat* ik ben en *wat* God is om bewust te worden van *dat* ik ben en *dat* God is. Dit is wat William Johnston het existentiële gebed noemt vanwege het verlaten van alle wijzen van zijn.

De tweede stap is de afwijzing van alle gedachten en gevoelens omtrent het eigen zijn om bewust te worden van het zijn van God. Op deze manier leidt de auteur de lezer naar een totale zelfvergetelheid, een schijnbaar totaal zelfverlies voor een bewustzijn enkel van het zijn van Hem die we liefhebben.⁴⁴⁴

De monnik in het boek toont een diep inzicht in de menselijke geest, hij "kent" de menselijke geest en hij is zich bewust van 's mensen tragische capaciteit tot zelfbedrog, maar tegelijkertijd toont hij een delicate compassie voor hen die lijden in hun worsteling te kunnen vertoeven in verstilde liefde in de kern van hun zijn.⁴⁴⁵

Literair onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat er tot nog toe geen concrete stappen zijn ondernomen om gearticuleerde mystieke dynamische processen te analyseren binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling*. De narratief dynamische communicatieve relatie waardoor de tekst van dit werk de lezer beweegt in de communicatieve relatie tussen de tekst en zijn lezer verdient meer aandacht en onderzoek omdat die bijdraagt tot een dieper inzicht in welke mystieke dynamieken worden opgewekt tussen de auteur en de lezer. Binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* is niet alleen de communicatieve relatie tussen de auteur en zijn karakters, te weten de monnik en de leerling, belangrijk, maar de communicatieve relatie tussen de auteur en de lezer speelt ook een significante rol in de dynamieken binnen het boek.

Het onderzoek in *The Book of Privy Counseling* richt zich op de analyse van mystieke communicatieve relaties om de interne structuur daarin te onthullen. Door de narratieve communicatieve relatie tussen de monnik en de leerling openbaart de mystieke goddelijke dimensie zichzelf. De counsel presenteert de communicatie tussen God en de menselijke ziel.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Idem, p. 10

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid

Het doel van het onderzoek is om bij te dragen tot een dieper inzicht in welke mystieke dynamieken opgewekt worden tussen de auteur en de lezer.

Om dit doel te bereiken is het object van het onderzoek: de interne structuur van *The Book of Privy Counseling* te onthullen om dieper inzicht te krijgen welke mystieke en narratieve dynamieken opgewekt worden tussen de auteur en de lezer. Dit onderzoek dient een bredere en uitgebreidere reikwijdte aangezien het mogelijkheden kan bieden om mystieke processen bloot te leggen. Door het articuleren en onthullen van mystieke processen binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling*, kan het onderzoek wellicht een methode vormen om mystieke narratieve dynamische elementen in huidige counseling situaties te duiden.

Om de interne mystieke dynamische structuur binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* bloot te leggen, worden de mystieke communicatieve relaties tussen de monnik (de stem van de counselor) – (impliciete) auteur en de leerling – (impliciete) lezer enerzijds en tussen de auteur en de lezer anderzijds geanalyseerd. In dit werk is een communicatieve relatie tussen een concrete begeleidende monnik die communiceert met God en die God laat spreken. De stem van de leerling ‘spreekt’ door die van de counselor. In de communicatie tussen alle betrokken ‘partijen’ voltrekt zich de narratieve dynamische structuur. Om deze mystiek-narratieve dynamische structuur bloot te leggen luidt de onderzoeksvorag als volgt:

Welke mystieke dynamische communicatieve processen kunnen onderscheiden worden binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling*?

Het onderzoek is zowel intern als extern uitgevoerd. Intern, binnen de tekst, door onderzoek in de communicatie tussen de vertellende *Ik*-persoon, gepersonifieerd door de monnik en degene aan wie het verteld wordt, gepersonifieerd door de leerling. Extern is het onderzoek uitgevoerd naar de communicatie tussen de auteur en de lezer.

Het is een fundamentele voorwaarde om de narratieve dynamiek te analyseren en de mystagogische lagen bloot te leggen binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* om de mystieke dynamieken te onderscheiden.

Hoewel de counsel een didactische instructie geeft om naar binnen te keren en het initiatieproces in het diepste domein van contemplatie te voltrekken, treedt het op als een waarachtig levendige counsel waarin de betrokken partijen, de vertellende monnik (protagonist) en de luisterende leerling

(antagonist) expliciet deelnemen. De levendige, expliciete narratieve communicatie vindt plaats op het horizontale niveau van communicatie.

Naast de communicatie tussen de betrokken partijen op het horizontale niveau, communiceert de counsel als impliciete schrijver met de impliciete lezer gedirigeerd door de communicatie tussen de werkelijke schrijver met de werkelijke lezer. De laatst beschreven communicatie kan geplaatst worden op het verticale niveau of communicatie-laag. Bovendien, initieert de verticale communicatieve laag een transformatie van een “gewone” counseling naar een Goddelijke Counsel waarin de mystieke dynamieken, die gepaard gaan met de narratieve dynamieken, zich onthullen.

Het unieke van *The Book of Privy Counseling*, letterlijk een expliciete wijze van counseling, is dat het nieuwe mogelijkheden opent om te stellen dat deze manier van counseling zelf een vorm van spiritualiteit is.

Het onderzoek stelt vast dat door de narratieve dynamische lezing ook de mystieke dynamieken worden onthuld.

The Book of Privy Counseling communiceert op twee niveaus, lagen of dimensies: op een literair oppervlakkig niveau en op een dieper spiritueel niveau. Op de oppervlakte vindt de communicatie tussen de vertellende monnik en de leerling aan wie verteld wordt, plaats. In literaire bewoording vindt deze “oppervlakkige” communicatie plaats tussen de protagonist en de antagonist. Hierbij dient opgemerkt te worden dat de leerling, als de antagonist, gekend wordt door het verhaal van de vertellende monnik. In de onderliggende laag, ofwel in de dieptestructuur, vindt de communicatie plaats tussen de impliciete auteur en de impliciete lezer. Door de diepere lagen daalt de counseling spiraalsgewijs in de diepte van de ziel van zowel de (impliciete) auteur als in die van de (impliciete) lezer.

Volgens William Johnston vertegenwoordigt de counsel binnen de twee bovengenoemde communicatieve lagen of dimensies twee manieren van denken ofwel twee verschillende mentale activiteiten die zich laten zien op een verticaal en horizontaal niveau: het verticale, existentiële, supra-conceptuele niveau, ten opzichte van het horizontale, essentiële ofwel conceptuele niveau.⁴⁴⁶

Het horizontale niveau, ofwel de horizontale dimensie in het denken beweegt zich in opeenvolgende (denk)beelden en het concentreert zich op *wat* een persoon of een ding is, eerder dan *dat* iemand of iets is en daarin is

⁴⁴⁶ Johnston, W. *The mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, 2000, pp. 258 and 259

de geest bewust van tijd en plaats. Tot deze manier van denken behoren logica en een rationeel discours: dit is het conceptuele proces dat aan het werk is in het dagelijkse leven van iedereen. De auteur wendt deze manier van denken aan in zijn logische expositie van mystiek.

Het verticale niveau, ofwel de verticale dimensie in het denken beweegt zich niet in achtereenvolgende (denk)beelden maar het daalt spiraalsgewijs in de diepte van iemands zijn, zonder concepten, zonder beelden, en (op haar hoogste punt) zonder bewustzijn (van tijd). Dit vertelt *dat* realiteit is, eerder dan *wat* het is'.⁴⁴⁷

Volgens Johnston leidt de Engelse schrijver naar het bovenstaande wanneer hij 'de contemplatief vraagt niet te mediteren over de kwaliteiten van God, of te reflecteren op *wat* God is, maar om zichzelf op te houden in het existentiële besef *dat* God is en *dat* ik ben'.⁴⁴⁸

Kortom: in dit onderzoek zijn twee communicatieve lagen of dimensies onderzocht, in overweging nemende dat de counsel fundamenteel communiceert op het diepe spirituele niveau. Echter, het heeft de expliciete oppervlakkige communicatieve laag nodig om de diepere laag of dimensie te onthullen. Op de oppervlakte is de counsel explicet genoemd en beschreven, maar het is de diepe spirituele dimensie die werkelijk spreekt tot de lezer. Dit is het middelpunt van aandacht binnen dit onderzoek.

De mystiek-dynamische en de narratief-dynamische lezing tonen hoe de counsel gradueel transformeert in een Goddelijke Counsel waarin God zichzelf verbindt met de vertellende monnik, de ik-persoon, en met de impliciete lezer en daarmee ook met de werkelijke lezer. Met andere woorden: eerst wordt de relatie tussen de impliciete auteur en de impliciete lezer geëxpliciteerd en gaandeweg transformeert deze relatie in een goddelijke relatie die aantoon hoe God betrokken wil zijn.

Om aan te tonen hoe dit transformatieproces zich ontvouwt onderneemt het onderzoek de volgende stappen:

Ten eerste richt het onderzoek zich op een hermeneutische mystiek-dynamische lezing, waarin de mystieke communicatieve relatie tussen de monnik en de leerling wordt beschreven. Door die relatie beschrijft het onderzoek de verhouding tussen de (impliciete) auteur en de (impliciete) lezer. Zodra het onderzoek aan heeft getoond hoe die relaties zich onderling

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

verhouden, kunnen de intenties van de schrijver worden geanalyseerd en onderzocht. Het onderzoek is gestart met een hermeneutische lezing waardoor de counsel wordt geïnterpreteerd. Op het oppervlakte-niveau of de oppervlaktelaa^g communiceert de monnik met de leerling om de mogelijkheid te scheppen dat beide bewust kunnen worden dat God tot hen beide spreekt, zowel tot de schrijver als tot de lezer.

Ten tweede heeft het onderzoek getracht grip te krijgen op de narratieve structuur door de toepassing van een hermeneutische narratieve benaderingswijze. Nadat de relaties binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* zijn blootgelegd is het mogelijk om het narratief-dynamische en linguïstische communicatieve karakter ervan te onderzoeken. Dit deel van het onderzoek is uitgevoerd door een narratieve analyse, gebaseerd op de criteria van de narratieve dynamische lezing volgens de theorieën van Tolmie en Chatman.⁴⁴⁹ In navolging van de antropologische theorieën van Van Gennep en van Victor Turner, worden drie fasen aangeduid, namelijk de fasen van separatie, transitie (overgang) en incorporatie.⁴⁵⁰

Ten derde wordt de innerlijke logica van de Counsel aan de lezer onthuld door de mystieke en narratief-dynamische lezing. Door het leesproces wordt de lezer zich meer en meer bewust hoe zij zich in het contemplatieve proces kan gaan begeven. Dit proces bestaat uit achtereenvolgende stappen in een circulaire beweging. De Counsel neemt de lezer mee in de volgende drie fasen: de mystieke implicatie van zijn, de mystieke implicatie van de onderscheiding der geesten en de mystieke implicatie van overgave. Aangezien de mystagogie een relationeel proces is binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* kunnen de mystagogische implicaties belicht worden vanuit twee perspectieven: vanuit het perspectief van de Counsel en vanuit het perspectief van de lezer. Daarvoor behandelt dit deel van het onderzoek de drie fasen vanuit beide perspectieven. Om inzicht te krijgen in hoe de lezer betrokken kan worden in dit proces articuleert het onderzoek de mystieke implicaties.

In dit onderzoeksproces positioneert het onderzoek zich in de tradities van de monastieke leesbenaderingswijze, ofwel de 'lectio divina', toegepast op een geactualiseerde passende wijze om tot een fundamenteel verstaan te komen over hoe God in *The Book of Privy Counseling* werkt. Dit is op een wetenschappelijke en methodologische wijze uitgevoerd om de diepere dimensie van de tekst te onthullen. Het is een methode die toegepast kan

⁴⁴⁹ Tolmie, D.F. *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: a Practical Guide*, 1999 and Chatman, S., *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978

⁴⁵⁰ Turner, V. *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-structure*, 1969 and Gennep, v. A. 'The Rites of Passage', 1960

worden op verschillende vormen van literaire teksten om de diepere dimensies daarvan bloot te leggen.

Het onderzoek in *The Book of Privy Counseling* heeft de volgende resultaten bereikt:

Resultaten van de mystiek-dynamische lezing

De resultaten van de mystiek dynamische lezing zien er als volgt uit: het onderzoek heeft zich gericht op de hermeneutisch mystieke dynamische lezing waarin het de mystieke communicatieve relatie tussen de monnik en de leerling heeft beschreven. Door die relatie heeft het onderzoek de verhouding tussen de (impliciete) auteur en de (impliciete) lezer beschreven. Het onderzoek heeft aangetoond hoe die relaties zich onderling verhouden, daarna heeft het onderzoek de intenties van de schrijver geanalyseerd en onderzocht. Op het oppervlakteniveau communiceert de monnik met de leerling om het voor beide mogelijk te maken zich bewust te worden dat het God is die zowel tot de auteur als de lezer spreekt op een dieper spiritueel niveau.

Hermeneutiek wordt beschouwd als het meest wezenlijke niveau van lezen.⁴⁵¹ In de spirituele hermeneutische lezing komt het onderzoek tot de kern, tot de diepere betekenis van de tekst.⁴⁵² Met andere woorden: hermeneutiek wordt toegepast als de leesmethode om fundamenteel te verstaan hoe God in *The Book of Privy Counseling* (door)werkt.

Resultaten van de narratieve analyse

Het onderzoek heeft de theorieën van Van Gennep en van Victor Turner toegepast om de narratieve dynamieken van *The Book of Privy Counseling* bloot te leggen.

Het onderzoek heeft drie narratieve dimensies gevonden in ‘the rites of passage’ die vergelijkbaar zijn met de stappen die de auteur van *The Book of Privy Counseling* heeft ondernomen die de leerling-lezer begeleiden in de contemplatie.

De eerste fase van separatie, afscheiding: de leerling moet zich afzonderen en zichzelf bevrijden van vaste concepten, ideeën of manieren van leven of activiteiten, zoals mediteren over haar eigen zelf, of manieren van introspectie plegen om zelfbewustzijn te bereiken.

⁴⁵¹ Waaijman, K. *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 2002, p. 412

⁴⁵² Idem, p. 704

In de tweede fase van transitie, overgang, kan de leerling zich voelen alsof zij er tussen valt, waarin zij zich totaal vervreemd voelt van zichzelf en zichzelf bekleed voelt in niets dan “Hem”.⁴⁵³ In deze fase voelt iemand zich totaal ontdaan van enig herkenbaar imago of zijn. Hier voelt iemand zich in een liminale staat van zijn tussen vroegere en toekomstige identiteiten.⁴⁵⁴ Deze fase kan vergeleken worden met een ‘wolk van niet-weten’, een stille donkerte voor spirituele eenwording met God. In deze fase vindt de transformatie plaats.

In de derde en laatste fase van incorporatie, inlijving, stapt de leerling over de drempel van contemplatie in de vereniging. In *The Book of Privy Counseling* opent deze fase zichzelf waarin de ziel haar rust vindt in een vrijheid verheven boven twijfel en angstgevoelens, verzekerd in de wetenschap dat ze zich niet erg zal vergissen.⁴⁵⁵ Daarom is de onderscheiding der geesten van vitaal belang.

Door het gehele proces van initiatie heen blijft de monnik de monnik, echter, in de liminale transformatie wordt hij compleet vernieuwd, herschapen.

In de laatste fase van incorporatie, ofwel inlijving, binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling*, is het belangrijk de geesten te onderscheiden om er zeker van te zijn dat de ziel zich niet erg vergist. Daarom is de derde stap van de narratieve dynamische lezing met betrekking tot de incorporatie vooral gericht op de onderscheiding der geesten, zodat de leerling-lezer mag vertrouwen op de ultieme ervaring:

*De geest die God ziet en ervaart zoals Hij is in zijn naakte realiteit is niet meer gescheiden van Hem dan zij dat is van haar eigen wezen, dat zoals wij weten, een is in wezen en natuur. Zoals God een is met zijn wezen omdat zij een zijn van nature, zo is de geest, die hem ziet en ervaart, één met hem die zij ziet en ervaart, omdat ze een zijn geworden in genade.*⁴⁵⁶

Concluderend kan gesteld worden dat juist het narratief dynamische proces de betrokken partijen meetrekt in de diepere lagen van spiritueel mystiek Zijn.

⁴⁵³ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 171

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Idem, p. 188

⁴⁵⁶ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973, p. 186, vertaling M.J.P. Sommers

Door de mystieke en narratieve dynamische lezingen is de innerlijke logica helder geworden voor de lezer, die zich meer en meer bewust is geworden van hoe zich te begeven in het mystiek contemplatieve proces. Dit proces omvat de achtereenvolgende circulaire stappen in een spiraalsgewijze beweging. De counsel neemt de lezer mee in drie fases: de mystieke implicaties van zijn, de mystieke implicaties van de onderscheiding der geesten en de mystieke implicaties van overgave. Aangezien de mystagogie een relationeel proces is binnen *The Book of Privy Counseling* kunnen de mystieke implicaties belicht worden vanuit twee perspectieven: vanuit het perspectief van de counsel en vanuit het perspectief van de lezer.

De counsel trekt de lezer in zijn eigen spirituele domein, eerst door de lezer zich te laten bevrijden van alles behalve haar naakte bewustzijn van haar eigen zijn en zich te concentreren op *dat* zij is. In de fase van de onderscheiding der geesten waarschuwt de counsel de lezer doordringen te zijn van het verschil tussen haar en God. Tenslotte trekt de counsel de lezer in een complete overgave waarin zij leert gevoelig te zijn voor de Geest die haar in het geheim vertrouwelijk leidt in de diepte van haar hart om daar te wachten totdat de Heilige Geest zelf roert en van binnenuit wenkt.⁴⁵⁷

De gewaarwording van de Counsel als de goddelijke vertegenwoordiging van Gods Geest is de meest uitdagende overtuiging voor de lezer om zich over te geven aan contemplatie.

De Geest is geïncarneerd in de Counsel, die binnengegaan is in Gods diepste geheim. In de overgave aan de contemplatie is de Heilige Geest geïncorporeerd in de lezer.

⁴⁵⁷ Idem, p. 177

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Appendix 1: modern English version

The Book of Privy Counseling

My dear friend in God, this book is for you, personally, and not for the general public, for I intend to discuss your interior work of contemplation as I have come to understand it and you. If I were writing for everyone, I should have to speak in general terms, but as I am writing for you alone, I will concentrate on only those things which I believe to be most personally helpful to you at this time. Should anyone else share your interior dispositions and be likely to profit from this book also, all the better. I will be delighted. But it is you alone I have in mind right now, and your interior life, as I have come to understand it. And so, to you (and others like you) I address the following pages.⁴⁵⁸

CHAPTER 1

‘When you go apart to be alone for prayer, put from your mind everything you have been doing or plan to do. Reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil.’ ‘Do not pray with words unless you are really drawn to this; or if you do pray with words, pay no attention to whether they are many or few. Do not weigh them or their meaning. Do not be concerned about what kind of prayers you use, for it is unimportant whether or not they are official liturgical prayers, psalms hymns, or anthems; whether they are for particular or general intentions; or whether you formulate them interiorly, by thoughts, or express them aloud, in words’. ‘See that nothing remains in your conscious mind save a naked intent stretching out towards God’. ‘Leave it stripped of every particular idea *about* God (what he is like in himself or in his works) and keep only the simple awareness *that he is as he is*. Let him be thus, I pray you, and force him not to be otherwise. Search into him no further, but rest in this faith as on solid ground.

This awareness, stripped of ideas and deliberately bound and anchored in faith, shall leave your thought and affection in emptiness except for a naked thought and blind feeling of your own being. It will feel as if your whole desire cried out to God and said:

That which I am I offer to you, O lord,
Without looking to any quality of your
Being but only to the fact that you
are as you are; this, and nothing more.

Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you. For I want your thought of self to be as naked and as simple as your thought of God, so that you may be spiritually united to him without any fragmentation and scattering of

⁴⁵⁸ Johnston, W. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 1973

your mind. He is your being and in him you are what you are, not only because he is the cause and being of all that exists, but because he is *your* cause and the deep centre of *your* being. Therefore, in this contemplative work think of your self and of him in the same way: that is, with the simple awareness that he is as he is, and that you are as you are. In this way your thought will not be fragmented or scattered, but unified in him who is all.

Yet keep in mind this distinction between yourself and him: he is your being but you are not his. It is true that everything exists in him as in its source and ground of being, and that he exists in all things, as their cause and their being.

Yet a radical distinction remains: he alone is his own cause and his own being. For as nothing can exist without him, so he cannot exist without himself. He is his own being and the being of everything else. Of him alone may this be said; and thus he is wholly separate and distinct from every created thing. And thus, also, he is one in all things and all things are one in him. For I repeat: all things exist in him; he is the being of all.

And since this is so, let Grace unite your thought and affection to him, while you strive to reject all minute inquiry into the particular qualities of your blind being or of his. Leave your thought quite naked, your affection uninvolved, and your self simply as you are, so that Grace may touch and nourish you with the experimental knowledge of God as he really is.⁴⁵⁹ In this life, this experience will always remain dark and partial so that your longing desire for him be ever newly enkindled. Look up joyfully, then, and say to your Lord, in words or desire:

That which I am, I offer to you,
O Lord, for you are it entirely.

Go no further, but rest in this naked, stark, elemental awareness that you are as you are.

CHAPTER 2

It is not hard to master this way of thinking. I am certain that even the most uneducated man or woman, accustomed to a very primitive type of life, can easily learn it. Sometimes I smile to myself (though not without a touch of sadness), and marvel at those who claim that I write to you and others a complicated, difficult, lofty, and strange doctrine, intelligible to only a few clever and highly trained minds. It is not simple, uneducated folk who say this either; it is scholars and learned theologians. To these people in particular I want to reply.

It is a great pity and a sad commentary on the state of those supposedly committed to God that, in our day, not just a few people, but nearly everyone (excepting one or two of God's special friends, here and there) is so blinded by a mad scramble for the latest theology or discoveries in the natural sciences that

⁴⁵⁹ Philippians 3:1-16

they cannot begin to understand the true nature of this simple practice; a practice so simple that even the most uneducated peasant may easily find in it a way to real union with God in the sweet simplicity of perfect love. Unfortunately, these sophisticated people are no more capable of understanding this truth in sincerity of heart than a child at his ABC's is able to understand the intricacies of erudite theologians. Yet, in their blindness, they insist on calling such a simple exercise deep and subtle; whereas, if they examined it rationally, they would discover it to be as clear and plain as the lessons of a beginner.

Surely it is beginner's fare, and I consider him hopelessly stupid and dull who cannot think and feel *that he is*; not how or what he is, but *that he is*. Such elemental self-awareness is obviously proper to the dumbest cow or most unreasonable beast. (I am being facetious, of course, for we cannot really say that one animal is dumber or more unreasonable than another). But it is only fitting for a man to realise and experience his unique self-existence, because man stands apart in creation, far above all the beasts, as the only creature Graced with reason.

And so, go down to the deepest point of your mind and think of yourself in this simple, elemental way. (Others will mean the same thing, but because of their experience, speak of the mind's "pinnacle" and of this awareness as the "highest human wisdom".) In any case, do not think *what you are* but *that you are*. For I grant that to realise what you are demands the effort of your intelligence in a good deal of thought and subtle introspection. But this you have done for quite a while with the help of God's Grace; and you understand to some degree (as much as you need to for the present) just what you really are – a human being by nature and a pitiful, fallen wretch through sin. Well, do you know this? Yes, and probably you feel that you know only too well, from experience, the defilements that follow and befall a man because of sin. Fie on them! Forget them, I pray you. Reflect on them no further for fear of contamination. Instead, remember that you also possess an innate ability to know *that you are*, and that you can experience this without any special natural or acquired genius.

So, now, forget your misery and sinfulness and, on that simple elemental level, think only that you are as you are. I am presuming, of course, that you have been duly absolved of your sins, general and particular, as Holy Church requires. Otherwise, I should never approve of you or anyone else beginning this work. But if you think you have done your best in this matter, take up this work. You may still feel the burden of your sin and wretchedness so terribly that you are uncertain what is best for yourself, but do as I tell you now.

Take the good gracious God just as he is, as plain as a common poultice, and lay him to your sick self, just as you are. Or, if I may put it another way, lift up your sick self, just as you are, and let your desire reach out to touch the good, gracious God, just as he is, for to touch him is eternal health. The woman in the Gospel testifies to this when she says: "If I but touch the hem of his garment I shall be healed"⁴⁶⁰ She was healed physically; but even more shall you be healed of your

⁴⁶⁰ Matthew 9: 21; Marcus. 5:28

spiritual illness by this lofty, sublime work in which your desire reaches out to touch the very being of God, beloved in himself.⁴⁶¹

Step up bravely, then, and take this medicine. Lift up your sick self, just as you are, to the gracious God, just as he is. Leave behind all inquiry and profound speculation into your being or his. Forget all these qualities and everything about them, whether they be pure or defiled, natural or Grace-given, divine or human. Nothing matters now except that you willingly offer to God that blind awareness of your naked being in joyful love, so that Grace can bind you and make you spiritually one with the precious being of God, simply as he is in himself.

CHAPTER 3

No doubt, when you begin this practice your undisciplined faculties, finding no meat to feed upon, will angrily taunt you to abandon it. They will demand that you take up something more worthwhile, which means, of course, something more suited to them. For you are now engaged in a work so far beyond their accustomed activity that they think you are wasting your time. But their dissatisfaction, inasmuch as it arises from this, is actually a good sign; since it proves that you have gone on to something of greater value. So I am delighted. And why not? For nothing I can do, and no exercise of my physical or spiritual faculties can bring me so near to God and so far from the world, as this naked, quiet awareness of my blind being and my joyful gift of it to God.

Do not be troubled, then, if your faculties rebel and plague you to give it up. As I say, it is only because they find no meat for themselves in this practice. But you must not yield. Master them by refusing to feed them despite their rage. By feeding them, I mean giving them all sorts of intricate speculations about the details of your being to gnaw on. Meditations like this certainly have their place and value, but in comparison to the blind awareness of your being and your gift of self to God, they amount to a rupture and dispersion of that wholeness so necessary to a deep encounter with God. Therefore, keep yourself recollected and poised in the deep centre of your spirit and do not wander back to working with your faculties under any pretext no matter how sublime.⁴⁶²

Heed the counsel and instructions which Solomon gave to his son when he said:

Worship the Lord with your substance
And feed the poor with your first fruits.
Thus shall your barns be filled with abundance
And your presses run over with wine⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 6:17

⁴⁶² Philippians 3:13

⁴⁶³ Proverbs 3:9-10

Solomon said this to his son but take it as addressed to yourself, and understand it spiritually, according to the sense in which I, standing in his place, now explain it to you.

My dear friend in God, go beyond your intellect's endless and involved investigations and worship the Lord our God with your whole being. Offer him your very self in simple wholeness, all that you are and just as you are, without concentrating on any particular aspect of your being. In this way your attention will not be scattered nor your affection entangled, for this would spoil your singleness of heart and consequently your union with God.

“And with your first fruits feed the poor”. Here he (Solomon) refers to the most important of all the special gifts of nature and Grace bestowed on you at your creation and nurtured through the years until this moment. With these God-given gifts, these fruits, you are obliged to nourish and foster not only yourself but also all those who are your brothers and sisters by nature of Grace.⁴⁶⁴ The most important of these gifts I call your first fruits. It is the gift of being itself, the first gift each creature receives. It is true, of course, that all the attributes of your self-existence are so intimately bound to your being as to be actually inseparable from it. Yet, in a sense, they would have no reality if you did not first of all exist. And therefore, your existence deserves to be called the first of your gifts because it really is. Your being alone shall be called your *first fruits*.

If you begin to analyze thoroughly any or all of man's refined faculties and exalted qualities (for he is the noblest of God's creatures), you will come at length to the farthest reaches and ultimate frontiers of thought only to find yourself face to face with naked being itself. And if you were to use this analysis to rouse yourself to love and praise your Lord God who gifted you with being, and such a noble being (as meditating on your human nature will reveal), think where it would lead you. At first you might say, “I am; I see and feel that I am. And not only do I exist but I possess all sorts of personal talents and gifts”. But after counting up all these in your mind, you could still go a step farther and draw them all together in a single all-embracing prayer such as this:

That which I am and the way I am,
with all my gifts of nature and Grace,
You have given to me, O Lord, and you are all this.
I offer it all to you, principally to praise You
and to help my fellow Christians and myself.

Thus you can see that by pursuing your meditations to the farthest reaches and ultimate frontiers of thought, you will find yourself in the end, on the essential ground of being with the naked perception and blind awareness of your own being. And this is why your being alone can be called the first of your fruits.

So it is that naked being takes first place among all your fruits, all others being rooted in it. But now you have come to a time when you will no longer profit by

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

clothing or gathering into your awareness of naked being, any of all of its particulars, by which I mean your fruits, upon which you have laboriously meditated for so long.

Now it is enough to worship God perfectly with your substance, that is, with the offering of your naked being. This alone constitutes your first fruits; it will be the unending sacrifice of praise for yourself and for all men that love requires. Leave the awareness of your being unclothed of all thoughts about its attributes, and your mind quite empty of all particular details relating to your being or that of any other creature. For such thoughts will not satisfy your present need, further your growth, nor bring you and others closer to perfection. Let them alone. Truly these meditations are useless to you now. But this blind, general awareness of your being, conceived in an undivided heart, will satisfy your present need, further your growth, and bring you and all mankind closer to perfection. Believe me, it far surpasses the value of any particular thought, no matter how sublime.

CHAPTER 4

All this you can verify with the authority of the Scriptures, the example of Christ, and the scrutiny of sound logic. As all men were lost in Adam when he fell from the love which made him one with God, so all those, who, by fidelity to their own path in life, manifest their desire for salvation, will receive salvation through the Passion of Christ alone.⁴⁶⁵ For Christ gave himself, all that he was, as a perfect and complete sacrifice. He did not concentrate on the salvation of any one person in particular, but gave himself without reserve for all.

And no greater love can any other man have than to sacrifice his very self for the good of all who are his brothers and sisters by nature or Grace.⁴⁶⁶ For the spirit is of greater dignity than the flesh and thus it is of greater value to unite the spirit to God (who is its life) by the sublime food of love than to unite the flesh to the spirit (which is its life) by the food of earth. Of course, it is important to feed the body but unless you nourish the spirit also, you have not done everything. Both together are good, but the first, by itself, is best. For a healthy body alone will never merit salvation; but a robust spirit, even in a frail body, will not only merit salvation but reach its full perfection.

CHAPTER 5

You have reached a point where your further growth in perfection demands that you do not feed your mind with meditations on the multiple aspects of your being.⁴⁶⁷ In the past, these pious meditations helped you to understand something

⁴⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:22

⁴⁶⁶ John 15:13

⁴⁶⁷ Proverbs 3:9-10

of God. They fed your interior affection with a sweet and delightful attraction of him and spiritual things, and filled your mind with a certain spiritual wisdom. But now it is important that you seriously concentrate on the effort to abide continually in the deep centre of your spirit, offering to God that naked blind awareness of your being which I call your first fruits. If you do this, as you may with the help of God's Grace, be confident that Solomon's charge to feed the poor with your first fruits will be fully accomplished also, just as he promises; and all without your interior faculties having to seek or search carefully among the attributes of your being or of God's.

I want you to understand clearly that in this work it is not necessary to inquire into minute details of God's existence any more than of your own. For there is no name, no experience, and no insight so akin to the everlastingness of God than what you can possess, perceive, and actually experience in the blind loving awareness of this word, *is*.⁴⁶⁸ Describe him as you will: good, fair Lord, sweet, merciful, righteous, wise, all-knowing, strong one, almighty, as knowledge, wisdom, might, strength, love, or charity, and you will find them all hidden and contained in this little word, *is*. God in his very existence is each and all of these. If you spoke of him in a hundred like ways you would not go beyond or increase the significance of that one word, *is*. And if you used none of them, you would have taken nothing from it. So be blind in the loving contemplation of God's being as you are in the naked awareness of your own. Let your faculties rest from their minute inquiry into the attributes of his being or yours. Leave all this behind and worship him with your substance: all that you are, just as you are, offered to all that he is, just as he is. For your God is the glorious being of himself and you, in the naked starkness of his being.

And thus you will bind everything together, and in a wonderful way, worship God with himself because that which you are you have from him and it is he, himself.⁴⁶⁹ Of course, you had a beginning - that moment in time when he created you from nothing - yet your *being* has been and shall always be in him, from eternity to eternity, for he is eternal. And therefore, I will continue to cry out this one thing:

Worship God with your substance
and help all mankind with your first fruits,
Then shall your barns be filled with abundance.⁴⁷⁰

The promise contained in these last words is that your interior affection will be filled with an abundance of love and practical goodness arising out of your life in God, who is your ground of being and your singleness of heart.

And your presses shall run over with wine. These presses are your interior spiritual faculties. Formerly you forced and constrained them in all kinds of meditations and rational inquiry in an effort to gain some spiritual understanding of God and yourself, of his attributes and yours. But now they are filled and

⁴⁶⁸ Exodus 3:14

⁴⁶⁹ II Peter 1:4

⁴⁷⁰ Proverbs 3: 9-10

overflow with wine. This wine holy Scripture speaks of is accurately and mystically understood to be that spiritual wisdom distilled in the deep contemplation and high savouring of the transcendent God. And how spontaneously, joyously, and effortlessly shall all this happen through the working of Grace. Busy toil of yours is no longer necessary, for in the power of this gentle, blind contemplative work, angels will bring you wisdom. Indeed, the angels' knowledge is specially directed to this service as a handmaid to her lady.⁴⁷¹

CHAPTER 6

By its very nature, this practice makes one open to the high wisdom of the transcendent God, lovingly descending into the depths of a man's spirit, uniting and binding him to God in delicate, spiritual knowledge. In great praise of this joyful, exquisite activity the wise man, Solomon, bursts out and says:

Happy the man who finds wisdom
and who gains understanding.
For her profit is better than silver
and better than gold is her revenue.
She is the first and most pure of his fruits....
my son, keep counsel and advice before you;
They will be life to your soul
and beauty to your mouth.
Then you may go securely in your way,
and your foot will not stumble.
When you sleep you shall not fear
you shall rest and your sleep shall be sweet.
Be not afraid of the sudden terror
nor of the power of the wicked falling upon you
For the Lord will be at your side
and he will keep your foot so that you be not taken.⁴⁷²

Let me explain the hidden meaning of what he says here. Happy, indeed, is that man who finds the wisdom which makes him whole and binds him to God. Happy is he, who by offering to God the blind awareness of his own being enriches his interior life with a loving, delicate, spiritual knowledge that far transcends all the knowledge of natural or acquired genius.⁴⁷³ Far better this wisdom and ease in this delicate, refined interior work than the gain of gold or silver.⁴⁷⁴ In this passage, gold and silver symbolize all the knowledge of sense and spirit. Our natural faculties acquire this gold and silver by concentrating on

⁴⁷¹ Psalm 123:2

⁴⁷² Proverbs 3:13- 21, Job 28: 12-15, 27 and Psalms 18.3

⁴⁷³ Proverbs 3:13

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

things beneath us, within us, or like us, in their meditations on the attributes of God's being or the being of creatures.⁴⁷⁵ He then goes on to tell why this interior work is better when he says that it is the first and most pure of a man's fruits. And little wonder, when you realise that the high spiritual wisdom gained in this work freely and spontaneously bursts up from the deepest inner ground of his spirit. It is a wisdom, dark and formless, but far removed from all the fantasies of reason or imagination. Never will the straining and toil of the natural faculties be able to produce its like. For what they produce, be it ever so sublime or subtle, when compared to this wisdom, is little more than the sham emptiness of illusion. It is as distant from the truth, visible in the radiance of the spiritual sun, as the darkness of moonbeams in a winter's night is from the splendour of the sun on the clearest day of high summer.

Then Solomon continues. He advises his son to keep this law and counsel in which all the commandments and laws of the Old and New Testaments are perfectly fulfilled, with no particular effort to concentrate on any single one of them.⁴⁷⁶ This interior work is called a law simply because it includes in itself all the branches and fruits of the entire law. For if you examine it wisely, you will find that its vitality is rooted and grounded in the glorious gift of love which is, as the Apostle teaches, the perfection of the whole law. "The fullness of the law is love."⁴⁷⁷

I tell you, that if you keep this law of love and this life-giving counsel, it really will be your spirit's life, as Solomon says. Interiorly, you will know the repose of abiding in God's love. Exteriorly, your whole personality will radiate the beauty of his love, for with unfailing truth, it will inspire you with the most appropriate response in all your dealings with your fellow Christians. And on these two activities (the interior love for God and the outward expression of your love in relating to others) depend the whole law and the prophets, as the Scriptures say. Then as you become perfect in the work of love, both within and without, you will go on your way securely, grounded in Grace (your guide in this spiritual journey), lovingly offering your blind, naked being to the glorious being of your God. Though they are distinct in nature, Grace has made them one.⁴⁷⁸

CHAPTER 7

*And the foot of your love shall not stumble.*⁴⁷⁹ This means that when, with experience, this interior work becomes a spiritual habit, you will not easily be enticed or led away from it by the meddlesome queries of your natural faculties, though in the beginning it was difficult to resist them.⁴⁸⁰ We might express the

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Proverbs 3.14b and 3.21 b, 3.22

⁴⁷⁷ Rom. 13:10

⁴⁷⁸ Matthew 22.40

⁴⁷⁹ Proverbs 3:23 and 26

⁴⁸⁰ Philippians 3:13

same thing like this: “Then the foot of your love shall neither stumble nor fall on any sort of illusion arising from the insatiable seeking of your faculties”.⁴⁸¹ And this is because, as I said before, in the contemplative work, all their inquisitive seeking is utterly rejected and forgotten lest the human liability of falsehood contaminate the naked awareness of your blind being and draw you away from the dignity of this work.

Every particular thought of creatures that enters your mind, in addition to or instead of that simple awareness of your naked being (which is your God and your desire for him), draws you back to the business of your subtle, inquisitive faculties. Then you are no longer totally present to yourself or to your God, and this amounts to the fragmentation and scattering of any deep concentration on his being and yours. And so, with the help of his Grace and the light of the wisdom that comes from perseverance in this work, remain whole and recollected in the depths of your being as often as you can.

As I have already explained to you, this simple work is not a rival to your daily activities. For with your attention centred on the blind awareness of your naked being united to God’s, you will go about your daily rounds, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, going and coming, speaking and listening, lying down and rising up, standing and kneeling, running and riding, working and resting.⁴⁸² In the midst of it all, you will be offering to God continually each day the most precious gift you can make. This work will be at the heart of everything you do, whether active or contemplative.

Moreover, Solomon also says in this passage that if you sleep in this blind contemplation, far from all the noise and agitation of the evil one, the false world, and the frail flesh, you shall fear no peril nor any deceit of the fiend. For without doubt, when the evil one discovers you at work, he will be utterly confused, and blinded by an agonizing, ignorance of what you are doing, he will be driven by mad curiosity to find out. But never mind, *for you shall graciously take your rest* in the loving union of your spirit with God’s.

Your sleep shall be untroubled; yes, for it shall bring deep spiritual strength and nourishment to renew both your body and your spirit.⁴⁸³ Solomon confirms this shortly after when he says, it is *complete healing for the flesh*.⁴⁸⁴ He simply means that it will bring health to all the frailty and sickness of the flesh. And well it might, for all sickness and corruption came upon the flesh when man fell from this work. But when, with the Grace of Jesus (which is always the principal agent in contemplation), the spirit again rises to it, the flesh will be completely healed. And I must remind you that it is only by the mercy of Jesus and your loving consent that you may hope to attain this. So I add my voice to Solomon’s, as he

⁴⁸¹ Proverbs 3:23 and 26

⁴⁸² Cloud Author, A Pistle of Discrescyon of Stirings, 70/13 - 72

⁴⁸³ Proverbs 3:8

⁴⁸⁴ Proverbs 3:8 and 4:22

speaks in this passage, and I encourage you to stand firm in this work,⁴⁸⁵ continually offering God your wholehearted consent in the joy of love.

Be not afraid of the sudden terror or of the power of the wicked... Here the wise man says: “Do not be overcome with anxious dread if the evil one comes (as he will) with sudden fierceness, knocking and hammering on the walls of your house; or if he should stir some of his mighty agents to rise suddenly and attack you without warning.” Let us be clear about this: the fiend must be taken into account.⁴⁸⁶ Anyone beginning this work (I do not care who he is) is liable to feel, smell, taste, or hear some surprising effects concocted by this enemy in one or other of his senses. So do not be astonished if it happens. There is nothing he will not try in order to drag you down from the heights of such valuable work. And so I tell you, watch over your heart in the day of suffering, trusting with joyful confidence in our Lord’s love. For the Lord is at your side and will *keep your foot so that you be not taken.*⁴⁸⁷ Yes, he will be close by your side ready to help you.⁴⁸⁸

He will keep your foot..... The foot he speaks of here is the love by which you mount up to God, and he promises that God will protect you so that you are not overcome by the wiles and deceits of your enemies. These, of course, are the fiend along with his cohorts, the false world and the flesh.

See, my friend! Our mighty Lord, he who is love, he who is full of wisdom and power, he himself will guard, defend, and succour all who utterly forsake concern for themselves and place their love and trust in him.

CHAPTER 8

But where shall we find a person so wholeheartedly committed and firmly rooted in the faith, so sincerely gentle and true, having made self, as it were, nothing and so delightfully nourished and guided by our Lord’s love? Where shall we find a loving person, rich with a transcendent experience and understanding of the Lord’s omnipotence, his unfathomable wisdom and radiant goodness; one who understands so well the unity of his essential presence in all things and the oneness of all things in him that he surrenders his entire being to him, in him, and by his Grace, certain that unless he does he will never be perfectly gentle and sincere in his effort to make self as nothing? Where is a man of sincerity, who by his noble resolve to make self as nothing, and high desire that God be all in the perfection of love, deserves to experience the mighty wisdom and goodness of God, succouring, sheltering, and guarding him from his foes within and without? Surely such a man will be deeply drenched in God’s love and in the full and final

⁴⁸⁵ Proverbs 3:23-25

⁴⁸⁶ Proverbs 3:25

⁴⁸⁷ Proverbs 3:26

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

loss of self as nothing, or less than nothing, if less were possible; and thus he will rest untroubled by feverish activity, labour, and concern for his own wellbeing.

Keep your human objections to yourselves, you half-hearted folk! Here is a person so touched by Grace that he can forsake himself in honest and unreserved self-forgetfulness. Do not tell me that by any rational appraisal he is tempting God. You say this only because you dare not do so yourselves. No, be content with your own calling in the active life; it will bring you to salvation. But leave these others alone. What they do is beyond the comprehension of your reason, so do not be shocked or surprised by their words and deeds.

Oh for shame! How long must you go on hearing or reading of all this without believing and accepting it? I refer to all our fathers who wrote and spoke about in times past, to that which is the fruit and flower of the Scriptures. Either you are so blind that the light of faith can no longer help you to understand what you read, or you are so poisoned by a secret envy that you are unwilling to believe such a great good might come to your brethren and not to you. Believe me, if you are wise, you will watch out for your enemy and his insidious ways; for what he wants is to have you rely more on your own reason than on the ancient wisdom of our true fathers, the power of Grace, and the designs of our Lord.

How often have you not read or heard in the holy, wise, and reliable writings of the fathers that as soon Benjamin was born, his mother, Rachel, died.⁴⁸⁹ Here Benjamin represents contemplation and Rachel represents reason. When one is touched by the Grace of authentic contemplation (as he surely is in the noble resolve to make self as nothing, and the high desire that God be all), there is a sense in which we can really say that reason dies. But have you not often heard and read all this in the works of various holy and scholarly men? What makes you so slow to believe it? And if you do believe it, how dare you let your prying intellect rummage among the words and deeds of Benjamin? Now Benjamin is a figure of all who have been snatched beyond their senses in an ecstasy of love,⁴⁹⁰ and of them the prophet says: “There is Benjamin, a young child, in excess of mind.”⁴⁹¹ I warn you: be vigilant lest you imitate those wretched human mothers who slew their newly born children. Watch, lest you accidentally thrust your bold spear with all your might at the power, wisdom, and designs of the Lord. I know you want only to further his plans; yet, if you are not careful, you may mistakenly destroy them in the blindness of your inexperience.

CHAPTER 9

In the early Church, when persecution was common, all sorts of people (not especially prepared by pious, devotional practices) were so marvellously and suddenly touched by Grace that without further recourse to reason they ran to die

⁴⁸⁹ Genesis 35:18

⁴⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:13

⁴⁹¹ Psalm 68:28

with the martyrs. We read of craftsmen casting away their tools and of school children flinging down their books, so great was their eagerness for martyrdom. In our times the Church is left in peace, but is it hard to believe that God still can and may touch all sorts of people with the Grace of contemplative prayer in the same wonderful and unforeseen way? Is it really so strange that he should desire and actually do this? No, and I am convinced that God in his great goodness will continue to act as he wishes in those he chooses that in the end his goodness may be seen for what it is, to the astonishment of all the world. And anyone so lovingly determined to make self as nothing and so keenly desirous that God be all will most certainly be protected from the onslaught of his enemies within and without, by the gracious goodness of God himself. He need not marshal his own defences, for with faithfulness befitting his goodness. God will unfailingly protect those who, absorbed in the business of his love, have forgotten concern for themselves. Yet, is it surprising that they are so wonderfully secure? No, for truth and gentleness have made them fearless and strong in love.

But one who does not dare abandon himself to God and criticises others who do manifests an inner emptiness. For either the evil one has robbed his heart of the loving confidence he owes to God and the spirit of good will he owes to his fellow Christians, or else he is not yet sufficiently steeped in gentleness and truth to be a real contemplative. You, however, must not be afraid to commit yourself in radical dependence upon God or to abandon yourself to sleep in the blind contemplation of God as he is, far from the uproar of the wicked world, the deceitful fiend, and the weak flesh. Our Lord shall be at your side ready to help you; he will guard your step so that you be not taken.

It is not without reason that I liken this work to sleep. For in sleep the natural faculties cease from their work and the whole body takes its full rest, nourishing and renewing itself. Similarly, in this spiritual sleep, those restless spiritual faculties, Imagination and Reason, are securely bound and utterly emptied,⁴⁹² while the whole inner man is wonderfully nourished and renewed.

Do you see now why I tell you to bind up your faculties by refusing to work with them and be absorbed, instead, in offering to God the naked, blind awareness of your own being? But I say again: be sure that it is naked and not clothed in any ideas about the attributes of your being. You might be inclined to clothe it in ideas about the dignity and goodness of your being or with endless considerations of the intricate details relating to man's nature or the nature of other creatures. But as soon as you do this, you have given meat to your faculties and they will have the strength and opportunity to lead you on to all sorts of other things. I warn you, before you will find yourself distracted and bewildered. Please be wary of this trap, I pray you.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Proverbs 3:24

⁴⁹³ Luke 10:41

CHAPTER 10

But perhaps your insatiable faculties have already been busy examining what I have said about the contemplative work. They are restless because it goes beyond their skill and they have left you puzzled and suspicious about this way to God. Actually, this is not surprising. For in the past, you have been so dependent upon them that you will not easily put them aside now, even though the contemplative work requires that you do. At the moment, however, I see that your heart is troubled and wondering about all this. Is it really as pleasing to God as I say? And if so, why? I will reply to all this, but I want you to realise that these very questions arise from a mind so inquisitive that under no circumstance will it give you peace in consenting to this work, until its curiosity has been appeased to some degree by a rational explanation. But since this is the case, I will not refuse. I will yield to your proud intellect, descending to the level of your present understanding, that afterward you may rise to mine, trusting my counsel and setting no bounds to your docility. I call upon the wisdom of St. Bernard, who says that perfect docility sets no bounds. You limit your docility when you hesitate to follow the counsel of your spiritual father before your own judgment has ratified it. See, how I desire to win your confidence! Yes, I really do, and I shall. But it is love that moves me, rather than any personal ability, degree of knowledge, depth of understanding, or proficiency in contemplation itself. At any rate, I trust this is so, and pray God to supply where I fail, for my knowledge is only partial whereas his is complete.

CHAPTER 11

Now to satisfy your proud intellect I will sing the praises of this work. Believe me, if a contemplative had the tongue and the language to express what he experiences, all the scholars in Christendom would be struck dumb before this wisdom.

Yes, for by comparison the entire compendium of human knowledge would appear as sheer ignorance. Do not be surprised, then, if my awkward, human tongue fails to explain its value adequately. And God forbid that the experience itself become so degenerate as to fit into the narrow confines of human language. No, it is not possible and certainly will never happen; and God forbid that I should ever want that! Whatever we may say of it is not it, but only about it. Yet since we cannot say what it is, let us try to describe it, to the confusion of all proud intellects, especially yours, which is the actual reason for my writing at this time.

Let me begin by asking you a question. Tell me, what is the substance of man's ultimate, human perfection and what are the fruits of this perfection? I will answer for you. Man's highest perfection is union with God in consummate love, a destiny so high, so pure in itself, and so far beyond human thought that it cannot

be known or imagined as it really is. Yet wherever we find its fruits, we may safely assume that it abounds. Therefore, in declaring the dignity of the contemplative work above all others, we must first distinguish the fruits of man's ultimate perfection.

These fruits are the virtues which ought to abound in every perfect man. Now, if you study carefully the nature of the contemplative work and then consider the essence and manifestation of each separate virtue, you will discover that all the virtues are clearly and completely contained in contemplation itself, unspoiled by twisted or selfish intent.

I will mention no particular virtue here for it is not necessary and besides, you have read them in my other books. It will suffice to say that the contemplative work, when it is authentic, is that reverent love, that ripe, harvested fruit of a man's heart which I told you in my little *Letter of Prayer*.⁴⁹⁴ It is the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the secret love planted deep in an undivided heart, the Ark of the Covenant. It is Denis' mystical theology what he calls his wisdom and his treasure, his luminous darkness, and his unknown knowing. It is what leads you to a silence beyond thought and words and what makes your prayer simple and brief. And it is what teaches you to forsake and repudiate all that is false in the world.

But even more, it is what teaches you to forsake and repudiate your very self, according to the Gospel's command: "Let anyone who wishes to come after me deny himself, carry his cross and follow me".⁴⁹⁵ In the context of all we have been saying about contemplation, it is as if Christ were to say: "He who wishes to come humbly after me – not with me, but after me – to the joy of eternity or the mount of perfection...." Christ went ahead of us because this was his destiny by nature; we come after him by Grace, and Grace higher than our human nature. In these words he teaches us that we may follow him to the mount of perfection as it is experienced in contemplation, only if he first calls us and leads us there by Grace.

This is the absolute truth. And I want you (and others like you who may read this) to understand one thing very clearly. Although I have encouraged you to set out in the contemplative way with simplicity and boldness, nevertheless I am certain, without doubt or fear or error, that Almighty God himself, independently of all techniques, must always be the chief worker in contemplation. It is he who must always awaken this gift in you by his Grace. And what you (and others like you) must do is make yourselves completely receptive, consenting and suffering his divine action in the depths of your spirit.⁴⁹⁶ Yet the passive consent and endurance you bring to this work is really a distinctively active attitude; for by the singleness of your desire ever reaching up to your Lord, you continually open yourself to his action. All this, however, you will learn for yourself through experience and the insight of spiritual wisdom.

⁴⁹⁴ Cloud-Author, A Pistle of Preier, 48/13 – 52/15 and 50/24-25 , 25/12 and 52/16 – 59/5

⁴⁹⁵ Matthew 16:24

⁴⁹⁶ Cloud-author, A pistle of Preier 56/2-3

But since God in his goodness stirs and touches different people in different ways (some through secondary causes and others directly), who dares to say that he may not be touching you and others like you through the instrumentality of this book. I do not deserve to be his servant, yet in his mysterious designs, he may work through me if he so wishes, for he is free to do as he likes. But I suppose after all that you will not really understand all this until your own contemplative experience confirms it. So I simply say: prepare yourself to receive the Lord's gift by heeding his words and realizing their full meaning. "Anyone who wishes to come after me let him forsake himself". And tell me, what better way can one forsake and scorn himself and the world than by refusing to turn his mind to either of them or to anything about them?

CHAPTER 12

But now I want you to understand that although in the beginning I told you to forget everything save the blind awareness of your naked being, I intended all along to lead you eventually to the point where you would forget even this, so as to experience only the being of God. It was with an eye to this ultimate experience that I said in the beginning: *God is your being*. At that time I felt it was premature to expect you to rise suddenly to a high spiritual awareness of God's being. So I let you climb toward it by degrees, teaching you first to gnaw away on the naked, blind awareness of your self until by spiritual perseverance you acquitted an ease in this interior work; I knew it would prepare you to experience the sublime knowledge of God's being. And ultimately, in this work, that must be your single abiding desire: the longing to experience only God. It is true that in the beginning I told you to cover and clothe the awareness of your God with the awareness of your self, but only because you were still spiritually awkward and crude. With perseverance in this practice, I expected you to grow increasingly refined in singleness of heart, I expected you to grow increasingly refined in singleness of heart until you were ready to strip, spoil, and utterly unclothe your self awareness of everything, even the elemental awareness of your own being, so that you might be newly clothed in the gracious stark experience of God as he is in himself.⁴⁹⁷

For this is the way of all real love. The lover will utterly and completely despoil himself of everything, even his very self, because of the one he loves. He cannot bear to be clothed in anything save the thought of his beloved.⁴⁹⁸ And this is not a passing fancy. No, he desires always and forever to remain unclothed in full and final self-forgetting. This is love's labour; yet, only he who experiences it will really understand. This is the meaning of our Lord's words: "Anyone who wishes to love me let him forsake himself." It is as if he were to say: "A man must

⁴⁹⁷ Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 4:22-24

⁴⁹⁸ Galatians 3:27

despoil himself of his very self if he sincerely desires to be clothed in me, for I am the full flowing garment of eternal and unending love".⁴⁹⁹

CHAPTER 13

And so, when in this work you become aware that you are perceiving and experiencing self and not God, be filled with sincere sorrow and long with all your heart to be entirely absorbed in the experience of God alone. Cease not to desire the loss of that pitiful knowledge and corrupted awareness of your blind being. Long to flee from self as from poison. Forget and disregard your self as ruthlessly as the Lord demands.

Yet do not misunderstand my words. I did not say that you must desire to un-be, for that is madness and blasphemy against God. I said that you must desire to lose the knowledge and experience of self. This is essential if you are to experience God's love as fully as possible in this life. You must realise and experience for yourself that unless you lose self you will never reach your goal. For wherever you are, in whatever you do, or howsoever you try, that elemental sense of your blind being will remain between you and your God. It is possible, of course, that God may intervene at times and fill you with a transient experience of himself. Yet outside these moments this naked awareness of your blind being will continually weigh you down and be as a barrier between you and your God, just as in the beginning of this work the various details of your being were like a barrier to the direct awareness of your self. It is then that you will realise how heavy and painful is the burden of self. May Jesus help you in that hour, for you will have great need of him.

All the misery in the world taken together will seem as nothing besides this, because then you will be a cross to your self. Yet this is the way to our Lord and the real meaning of his words: "Let a man first take up his cross" (the painful cross of self) that afterward he may "follow me into glory," or, as we might say, "to the mount of perfection." But listen to his promise: "There I will let him savour the delight of my love in the unspeakable experience of my divine person." See how necessary⁵⁰⁰ it is to bear this painful burden, the cross of self. It alone will prepare you for the transcendent experience of God as he is and for union with him in consummate love.

And now as this Grace touches and calls you, may you see and appreciate more and more the surpassing worth of the contemplative work.

⁴⁹⁹ Matthew 16:24

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 14

Tell me now, do you still expect your faculties to help you reach contemplation? Believe me, they will not. Imaginative and speculative meditations, by themselves, will never bring you to contemplative love. Be they ever so unusual, subtle, lovely, or deep; be they of your sinful past, the Passion of Christ, the joys of our Lady, or the saints and angels in heaven: or of the qualities, subtleties, and states of your being, or God's, they are useless in contemplative prayer. For myself, I choose to have nothing except that naked, blind sense of my self which I spoke of earlier.

Notice that I said of *my self* and not of *my activities*. Many people confuse their activities with themselves, believing them to be the same. But this is not so. The doer is one thing and his deeds are another. Likewise, God as he is in himself is quite distinct from his works which are something else again.

But returning to my point, the simple awareness of my being is all I desire, even though it must bring with it the painful burden of self and make my heart break with weeping because I experience only self and not God. I prefer it with its pain to all the subtle or unusual thoughts and ideas man may speak of or find in books (though to your clever and sophisticated mind these seem ever so sublime and pleasant). For this suffering will set me on fire with the loving desire to experience God as he really is.

All the same, these sweet meditations do have their place and value. A newly converted sinner just beginning to pray will find in them the surest way to the spiritual awareness of himself and God. Moreover, outside God's special intervention, I believe it is humanly impossible for a sinner to come to peaceful repose in the spiritual experience of himself and of God until he has first exercised his imagination and reason in appreciating his own human potential, as well as the manifold works of God, and until he has learned to grieve over sin and find his joy in goodness. Believe me, whoever will not journey by this path will go astray. One must remain outside contemplation, occupied in discursive mediation, even though he would prefer to enter into the contemplative repose beyond them. Many mistakenly believe that they have passed within the spiritual door when, in reality, they are still outside it. What is more, they shall remain outside until they learn to seek the door in humble love. Some find the door and enter within sooner than others, not because they possess a special admittance or unusual merit, but simply because the porter chooses to let them in.

CHAPTER 15

And oh, what a delightful place is this household of the spirit! Here the Lord himself is not only the porter but the door.⁵⁰¹ As God, he is the porter; as man, he is the door. And thus in the Gospel he says:

I am the door of the sheepfold
he that enters by me shall be saved.
He shall go in and go out
and find pastures.⁵⁰²
He that enters not through the door
but climbs up another way
the same is a thief and a robber.⁵⁰³

In the context of all we have been saying about contemplation, you may understand our Lord's words like this: "As God, I am the all-powerful porter and therefore, it is up to me to determine who may enter and how. But I chose instead to make a common, clear way to the sheepfold, open to everyone who wanted to come. So I clothed myself in an ordinary human nature and made myself utterly available so that no one could excuse himself from coming because he did not know the way. In my humanity, I am the door and whoever comes in by way of me shall be safe."

Those who wish to enter by the door should begin by meditating on the Passion of Christ⁵⁰⁴ and learn to be sorry for their personal sins, which caused that Passion. Let them reprove themselves with painful remorse and stir themselves to pity and compassion for their good master, for they have deserved to suffer but did not; while he did not, and suffered so wretchedly. And then let them lift up their hearts to receive the love and goodness of their God, who chose to descend so low as to become a mortal man. Anyone who does this enters by the door and shall be safe. Whether he goes in, contemplating the love and goodness of the Godhead, or goes out, meditating on the sufferings of his humanity, he shall find the spiritual pastures of devotion in abundance. Yes, and should he advance no further in this life, he will have plenty of devotion, and more than plenty, to nourish the health of his spirit and bring him to salvation.

Yet some will refuse to enter through this door, thinking to reach perfection by other ways. They will try to get past the door with all sorts of clever speculations, indulging their unbridled and undisciplined faculties in strange, exotic fantasies, scorning the common, open entry I spoke of before and the reliable guidance of a spiritual father as well. Such a person (and I care not who he is) is not only a night thief but a day prowler. A night thief he is, for he works in the darkness of sin. Full of presumption, he trusts his own personal insights and whims more than

⁵⁰¹ John 10:9

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ John 10:1

⁵⁰⁴ John 10:9

sound advice or the security of that common, clear path I described. A day prowler he is, for under the guise of an authentic spiritual life he secretly steals and arrogates to himself the outward signs and expressions of a true contemplative, while inwardly his life bears none of its fruits. Occasionally, too, this young man may feel a slight inclination toward union with God, and blinded by this take it as approval of what he does. In reality, by yielding to his unruly desires and refusing counsel, he is on the most perilous course possible. Even greater his peril, when he is full of ambition for things high above himself and well outside the ordinary, clear path of the Christian life. This path I have already explained in the light of Christ's words, when I showed you the place and necessity of meditation. I called it the door of devotion, and I assure you it is the safest entry to contemplation in this life.⁵⁰⁵

CHAPTER 16

But let us return to the subject, to what concerns you personally and those others who may share your dispositions.

Tell me now, if Christ is the door, what should a man do once he has found it? Should he stand there waiting and not go in? Answering in your place, I say: yes, this is exactly what he should do. He does well to go on standing at the door, for up till now he has lived a crude sort of existence according to the flesh, and his spirit is corroded with great rust. It is fitting that he waits at the door until his conscience and his spiritual father agree that this rust has been largely rubbed away. But most of all, he must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart and wait until the Spirit himself stirs and beckons him within. This secret invitation from God's Spirit is the most immediate and certain sign that God is calling and drawing a person to a higher life of Grace in contemplation.

For it will happen that a man reads or hears about contemplation and increasingly feels in his ordinary devotions a gently mounting desire to be more intimately united to God, even in this life, through the spiritual work he has read or heard about. Certainly, this indicates that Grace is touching him, because others will hear or read of the same thing and be quite unmoved, experiencing no special desire for it in their daily devotions. These folk do well to go on standing patiently at the door, as those called to salvation but not yet to its perfection.

At this point, let me digress a moment to warn you (and anyone else who may read this) of one thing in particular. It is something that applies always, but especially here, where I make a distinction between those called to salvation and those called to its perfection. Whether you feel called to one or the other is unimportant. What is important is that you attend to your own calling and do not discuss or judge God's designs in the lives of others. Do not meddle in his affairs: whom he stirs and calls and whom he does not; when he calls, whether early or

⁵⁰⁵ John 10:1

late; or why he calls one and not another. Believe me, if you begin judging this and that about other people you fall into error. Pay attention to what I say and try to grasp its importance. If he calls you, praise him and pray that you may perfectly respond to his Grace. If he has not called you as yet, humbly pray that he will, when the time is right. But do not presume to tell him what to do. Let him alone. He is powerful, wise, and full of desire to do the best for you and for all who love him. Be at peace in your own calling. Whether you wait outside in meditation or come within by contemplation, you have no cause to complain; both are precious. The first is good and necessary for everyone, though the second is better. Lay hold of it, then, if you can; or rather I should say, if Grace lays hold of you and if you hear our Lord's call. Yes, I speak more truly when I say this. For left to ourselves, we may proudly strain after contemplation, only to stumble in the end. Moreover, without him, it is all so much wasted effort. Remember, he himself says: "Without me you can do nothing."⁵⁰⁶ It is as if he were to say: "Unless I first stir you and attract you, and you then respond by consenting and suffering my action, nothing you do will completely please me". And you know by now that the contemplative work I have been describing must, of its nature, be wholly pleasing to God".

CHAPTER 17

I make this point on purpose to refute the ignorant presumption of certain people who insist that man is the principal worker in everything, even in contemplation. Relying too much on their natural cleverness and speculative theology, they say that God is the one who passively consents, even in this work. But I want you to understand that in everything touching contemplation, the contrary is true. God alone is the chief worker here, and he will act in no one who has not laid aside all exercise of his natural intellect in clever speculation.

Nevertheless, in every good work man acts in partnership with God, using his natural wit and knowledge to the best advantage. God is fully active here also, but in a different capacity, as it were. Here he consents to the act and assists man through secondary means: the light of Scripture, reliable counsel, and the dictates of common sense, which include the demands of one's state, age, and circumstances in life. In fact, in all ordinary activities a man must never pursue an inspiration – be it ever so pious or attractive – until he has rationally examined it in the light of these three witnesses.

Certainly it is reasonable to expect a man to act responsibly. Holy Church expects this and by law and decree permits no one to become a bishop (the highest degree of the active life) until she has determined by rigorous examination that he is capable of this office.

Thus, in all ordinary activities a man's native wit and knowledge (governed by the light of Scripture, good counsel, and common sense) take responsible

⁵⁰⁶ John 15:5

initiative, while God graciously consents and assists in all these matters belonging to the domain of human wisdom. But in all that touches contemplation, even the loftiest human wisdom must be rejected. For here God alone is the chief worker and he alone takes the initiative, while man consents and suffers his divine action.⁵⁰⁷

This, then, is the way I understand the Gospel's words: "Without me you can do nothing". They mean one thing in all ordinary activities and quite another in contemplation. All active works (whether pleasing to God or not) are done with God, but his part is, as it were, to consent and allow them. In the contemplative work, however, the initiative belongs to him alone, and he asks only that man consent and suffer his action. So you may take this as a general principle: We can do *nothing* without him; nothing good or nothing evil; nothing active or nothing contemplative.

Before I leave this point, let me add that God is with us in sin also, not because he co-operates in our sin, for he does not, but because he permits us to sin if we so choose. Yes, he leaves us so free that we may go to damnation if, in the end we choose this over sincere repentance.

In our good actions he does more than simply permit us to act. He actually assists us; to our great merit if we advance, though to our shame if we fall back. And in what touches contemplation he takes the complete initiative, first to awaken us, and then, as a master craftsman, to work in us, leading us to the highest perfection by uniting us spiritually to himself in consummate love.

And thus, when our Lord says: "Without me you can do nothing," he speaks to everyone since everyone on earth falls into one of these three groups: sinners, actives, or contemplatives. In sinners he is actively present, permitting them to do as they will; in actives, he is present, permitting and assisting; and in contemplatives, as sole master, awakening and leading them in this divine work.⁵⁰⁸

Alas! I have used many words and said very little. But I wanted you to understand when to use your faculties and when not to; and to see how God acts in you when you do use them, and when you do not. I felt this was important because this knowledge might prevent you from falling into certain deceptions which could otherwise have ensnared you. And since it is written, let it stand, though it is not particularly relevant to our subject. But we shall return to that now.

CHAPTER 18

With all I have said about the two callings of Grace, I sense a question rising in your mind. Perhaps you are thinking something like this: "Tell me, please, is

⁵⁰⁷ John 15:5

⁵⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:17, II Corinthians 6: 11 - 18

there one sign, or more, to help me test the meaning of this growing desire I feel for contemplative prayer, and this delightful enthusiasm which seizes me whenever I hear or read of it? Is God really calling me through them to a more intensive life of Grace such as you have described in this book, or does he give them simply as food and strength for my spirit that I may wait quietly and work on in that ordinary Grace which you call the door and common entry for all Christians?"

I will answer you as best I can.

You will notice, first of all, that I have given you two kinds of evidence for discerning whether or not God is calling you spiritually to contemplation. One was interior and the other exterior. Now it is my conviction that for discerning a call to contemplation, neither one, by itself, is sufficient proof. They must occur together, both indicating the same thing, before you may rely on them without fear of error.

The interior sign is that growing desire for contemplation constantly intruding in your daily devotions. And there is this much I can tell you about that desire. It is a blind longing of the spirit and yet there comes with it, and lingers after it, a kind of spiritual sight which both renews the desire and increases it. (I call this desire blind; because it resembles the body's faculty of motion – as in touching or walking – which as you know does not direct itself and is, therefore, in a way, blind.) So, carefully observe your daily devotions and see what is happening. If they are filled with the memory of your own sinfulness, considerations of Christ's Passion, or anything else pertaining to the ordinary Christian way of prayer I have described before, know that the spiritual insight accompanying and following upon this blind desire originates in your ordinary Grace. And this is a sure sign that God is not stirring you or calling you to a more intense life of Grace as yet. Rather, he is giving you this desire as food and strength to go on waiting quietly and working in your ordinary Grace

The second sign is exterior and it manifests itself as a certain joyful enthusiasm welling up within you, whenever you hear or read about contemplation. I call it exterior because it originates outside you and enters your mind through the windows of your bodily senses (your eyes and ears), when you read. As for the discernment of this sign, see if that joyful enthusiasm persists, remaining with you when you have left your reading. If it disappears immediately or soon after and does not pursue you in all else you do, know that it is not a special touch of Grace. If it is not with you when you go to sleep and wake up, and if it does not go before you, constantly intruding in all you do, enkindling and capturing your desire, it is not God's call to a more intense life of Grace, beyond what I call the common door and entry for all Christians. In my opinion, its very transience shows that it is simply the natural joy any Christian feels when he reads or hears about the truth and more especially a truth like this, which so profoundly and accurately speaks of God and the perfection of the human spirit.

CHAPTER 19

But when the joyful enthusiasm which seizes you as you read or hear about contemplation is really the touch of God calling you to a higher life of Grace, you will notice very different effects. So abounding will it be that it will follow you to bed at night and rise with you in the morning. It will pursue you through the day in everything you do, intruding into your usual daily devotions like a barrier between you and them.

Moreover it will seem to occur simultaneously with that blind desire which, in the meantime, quietly grows in intensity. The enthusiasm and the desire will seem to be part of each other; so much so, that you will think it is only one desire you feel, though you will be at a loss to say just precisely what it is that you long for.

Your whole personality will be transformed; your countenance will radiate an inner beauty, and for as long as you feel it nothing will sadden you. A thousand miles would you run to speak with another who you knew really felt it, and yet when you got there, find yourself speechless. Let others say what they will, your only joy would be to speak of it. Your words will be few, but so fruitful and full of fire that the little you say will hold a world of wisdom (though it may seem nonsense to those still unable to transcend the limits of reason). Your silence will be peaceful, your speech helpful, and your prayer secret in the depths of your being. Your self-esteem will be natural and unspoiled by conceit, your way with others gentle, and your laughter merry, as you take delight in everything with the joy of a child. How dearly you will love to sit apart by yourself, knowing that others, not sharing your desire and attraction, would only hinder you. Gone will be all desire to read or hear books, for your only desire will be to hear of it.

Thus the mounting desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm that seizes you when you read or hear of it meet and become one. These two signs (one interior and one exterior) agree, and you may rely on them as proof that God is calling you to enter within and begin a more intense life of Grace.

CHAPTER 20

You will learn that all I have written of these two signs and their wonderful effects is true. And yet, after you have experienced one, or perhaps all of them, a day will come when they disappear, leaving you, as it were, and barren; or, as it will probably seem to you then, worse than barren. Gone will be your new fervour, but gone, too, your ability to meditate as you had long done before. What then? You will feel as if you had fallen somewhere between the two ways having neither, yet grappling for both. And so it will be; but do not be too discouraged. Suffer it humbly and wait patiently for our Lord to do as he will.

For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit.

Great storms and temptations shall doubtlessly arise during this journey, leaving you bewildered and wondering which way to turn for help, for your affection will feel deprived of both your ordinary Grace and your special Grace. Yet I say again: fear not. Even though you think you have great reason to fear, do not panic. Instead, keep in your heart a loving trust in our Lord, or at any rate, do so as best you can under the circumstances. Truly, he is not far away and perhaps at any moment he will turn to you touching you more intensely than ever in the past with a quickening of the contemplative Grace. Then for as long as it remains, you will think you are healed and that all is well. But when you least expect, it will be gone again, and again you will feel abandoned in your ship, blown hither and yon, you know not where. Still, do not lose heart. I promise you he will return and soon. In his own time he will come. Mightily and more wonderfully than ever before he will come to your rescue and relieve your anguish. As often as he goes, he comes back. And if you will manfully suffer it all with gentle love, each coming will be more marvellous and more joyful than the last.⁵⁰⁹ Remember, all he does, he does with wise intent; he desires that you become as spiritually supple and shaped to his will as a fine Roan glove is to your hand.

And so he will sometimes go and sometimes come, that by both his presence and his absence he may prepare, educate, and fashion you in the secret depths of your spirit for this work of his. In the absence of all enthusiasm he will have you learn the real meaning of patience. With your enthusiasm gone you will think you have lost him, too, but this is not so; it is only that he wishes to teach you patience. For make no mistake about this; God may at times withdraw sweet emotions, joyful enthusiasm, and burning desires but he never withdraws his Grace from those he has chosen, except in the case of deadly sin.

Of this I am certain. All the rest, emotions, enthusiasm, and desires, are not in themselves Grace, only tokens of Grace. And these he may often withdraw, sometimes to strengthen our patience, sometimes for other reasons, but always for our spiritual good, though we may never understand. Grace, we must remember, in itself, is so high, so pure, and so spiritual that our senses and emotions are actually incapable of experiencing it.

The sensible fervor they experience are the tokens of Grace, not Grace itself. These our Lord will withdraw from time to time to deepen and mature our patience. He does so for other reasons, also, but I will not go into them right now. Instead, let us get on with our subject.

CHAPTER 21

Now although you will call the delights of sensible fervour his coming, strictly speaking, this is not so. Our Lord feeds and strengthens your spirit by the

⁵⁰⁹ Cloud-author, *A Pistle of Discrescyon of Stirrings*, 64/15

excellence, frequency, and deepening of those favours sometimes accompanying Grace so that you may perseveringly live in his love and service. But he works in two ways. On the one hand you learn patience in their absence and on the other you grow strong with the life-giving, loving food they provide in their coming. Thus our Lord fashions you by both until you become so joyfully supple and so sweetly pliable that he can lead you at last to the spiritual perfection and union with his will, which is perfect love. Then you will be as willing and content to forego all feelings of consolation, when he judges best, as to enjoy them unceasingly.

Moreover, in this time of suffering your love becomes both chaste and perfect. It is then that you will see your God and your love, and being made spiritually one with his love, nakedly experience him at the sovereign point of your spirit. Here, utterly despoiled of self and clothed in nothing but him, you will experience him as he really is, stripped of all the trapping of sensible delights, though these be the sweetest and most sublime pleasures possible on earth. This experience will be blind, as it must be in this life; yet, with the purity of an undivided heart, far removed from all the illusion and error liable to mortal man, you will perceive and feel that it is unmistakable he, as he really is.

Finally, the mind which sees and experiences God as he is in his naked reality is no more separate from him than he is from his own being, which as we know, is one in essence and nature. For just as God is one with his being because they are one in nature, so the spirit, which sees and experiences him, is one with him whom it sees and experiences, because they have become one in Grace.

CHAPTER 22

See then! Here are the signs you asked for. If you have any experience of them, you will be able to test (partially at least) the nature and meaning of the summons and awakening of Grace which you feel touching you interiorly during your spiritual devotions, and exteriorly whenever you read or hear about contemplation. As a rule, few people are so singularly touched and confirmed in the Grace of contemplation as to have an immediate and authentic experience of all these tokens together, in the very beginning.

Yet, if you think you have really experienced one or two of them, test yourself against the rigorous criteria of Scripture, your spiritual father, and your own conscience. If you feel they all approve as one voice, it is time to lay aside speculative reasoning of your being or God's, of your activities or his.

Formerly, they fed your intellect and led you beyond a worldly, material existence to the threshold of contemplation. But imagination and reason have taught you all they can and now you must learn to be wholly given to the simple spiritual awareness of your self and God.

CHAPTER 23

In Christ's life we have a powerful illustration of all I have been trying to say. Had there been no higher perfection possible in this life beyond seeing and loving him in his humanity, I do not believe he would have ascended into heaven while time lasted, nor withdrawn his physical presence from his friends on earth who loved him so dearly. But a higher perfection was possible to man in this life: the purely spiritual experience of loving him in his Godhead.

And for this reason he told his disciples, who were loath to give up his physical presence (just as you are loath to give up the speculative reflections of your subtle, clever faculties), that for their own good he would withdraw his physical presence from them. He said to them, "It is necessary for you that I go,"⁵¹⁰ meaning, "It is necessary for you that I depart physically from you." The holy doctor of the Church St. Augustine, commenting on these words, says: "Were not the form of his humanity withdrawn from our bodily eyes, love for him in his Godhead would never cleave to our spiritual eyes". And thus I say to you, at a certain point it is necessary to give up discursive meditation and learn to taste something of that deep, spiritual experience of God's love.

Relying on God's Grace to lead and guide you, you will come to this deep experience of his love by following the path I have set before you in these pages. It demands that you always and ever strive toward the naked awareness of your self, and continually offer your being to God as your most precious gift. But I remind you again: see that it is naked, lest you fall into error. Inasmuch as this awareness really is naked, you will at first find it terribly painful to rest in for any length of time because, as I have explained, your faculties will find no meat for themselves in it.

But there is no harm in this; in fact, I am actually delighted. Go ahead. Let them fast awhile from their natural delight in knowing. It is well said that man naturally desires to know. Yet at the same time, it is also true that no amount of natural or acquired knowledge will bring him to taste the spiritual experience of God, for this is a pure gift of Grace. And so I urge you: go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds.⁵¹¹ Knowledge is full of labour, but love, full of rest.

CHAPTER 24

Yet you may say: "Rest? What can he possibly be talking about? All I feel is toil and pain, not rest. When I try to follow his advice, suffering and struggle beset me on every side. On the one hand, my faculties hound me to give up this work,

⁵¹⁰ John 16:7

⁵¹¹ 1 Corinthians 8:1

and I will not; on the other, I long to lose the experience of myself and experience only God, and I cannot. Battle and pain assail me everywhere. How can he talk of rest? If this is rest, I think it is a rather odd kind of rest".

My answer is simple. You find this work painful because you are not accustomed to it, and did you realise its value, you would not willingly give it up for all the material joys and rest in the world. Yes, I know, it is painful and toilsome. Still, I call it rest because your spirit does rest in a freedom from doubt and anxiety about what it must do; and because during the actual time of prayer, it is secure in the knowledge that it will not greatly err.

And so persevere in it with humility and great desire, for it is a work that begins here on earth but will go on without end into eternity. I pray that the all-powerful Jesus may bring you and all those he has redeemed by his precious blood to this glory. Amen.

Appendix 2: middle English version

þE BOOK OF PRIUE COUNSELING

Goostly freende in God, as touching þin inward ocupacion as f. 92a
me þink þee disposid, I speke at þis tyme in specyal to þi-self, &
not to alle þoo þat þis writyng scholen here in general. For ȝif I
schuld write vnto alle, þan I must write þing þat were acordyng
to alle generaly. Bot siþ I at þis tyme schal write vnto þee in 5
special, þerfore I write none oþer þing bot soche as me þink þat is
moste speedful & acording to þin disposicion only. If eny oþer
be so disposid as þou arte, to whom þis writing may profite as vnto
þee, in so moche þe betir, for I am wel apaied. Neuerþeles, at þis
tyme, þin owne inward disposicion is only by it-self, as I may 10
conceiue it, þe poynte & þe prik of my beholdyng. & þerfore to
þee, in persone of alle oþer liche vnto þee, I sei þus:

Whan þou comyst bi þi-self þenk not before what þou schalt do
after, bot for sake as wel good þouȝtes as iuel þouȝtes. & prey not
wiþ þi mouþ bot þee list riȝt wel; & þan, ȝif þou ouȝt schalt sey, 15
loke not how mochel ne how litil þat it be, ne charge not what it is
ne what it bemeniþ, be it orison, be it psalm, ympne or antime, or
any oþer preyer, general or specyal, mental wiþ-inne enditid bi
þouȝt or vocale wiþ-outen by pronounsyng of worde. & loke þat
noȝting leue in þi worching mynde bot a nakid entent streching 20
into God, not cloþid in any specyal þouȝt of God in hym-self, how
he is in him-self or in any of his werkes, bot only þat he is as he is.
Lat hym be so, I prey þee, & make him on none oþer wise. Seche
no ferþer in hym by sotiltee of witte. þat byleue [be] þi grounde.

Title. Here beginnþ a tretyse of pruyue conseylle Kk Har²; Here folowith
the pistle of pruyuate cownsell Pa

1 God] crist Ihesu Har² 2 specyal] especiall Pa 3 þoo] them Pa
4 I must] tr. Pa write] a add Pa. 5 generaly] in generall Pa siþ]
sen Har²; that add. Pa schal write] om. Kk vnto] to Pa 6 oþer] om.
Kk 7 & acording] om. Har² 8 so] om. Kk Har² Pa writing]
shall comme & add. Pa 8-9 as . . . in] om. Pa 9 apaied] payed
Kk Har² 12 vnto] to Kk Pa 13 what] þat add. Har² 14 þouȝtes]
ȝoutes Har² 15 bot] ȝif add. Har² Pa þee] thow Pa ouȝt] om.
Har² sey] ouȝt add. Har² 16 ne] nor Pa. So always is] can., be written
above Pa 18 enditid] intendid Pa 20 leue] loue Pa bot] onely
add. Har² 21 in-] vn- Pa of God] om. Har² 24 ferþer] ferrer Har²
þat] lat Har², Lette Pa be] Har¹ has the unique reading by. See note

þis nakid entent, freely fastenid & groundid in verrey beleue, schal be nouȝt elles to þi þouȝt & to þi felyng bot a nakid þouȝt & a f. 92b blynde feling of | þin owne beyng: as ȝif þou seidist þus vnto God with-inne in þi menyng, 'Pat at I am, Lorde, I offre vnto þee, wiþ-5 outyn any lokyng to eny qualite of þi beyng, bot only þat þou arte as þou arte, wiþ-outen any more.'

Pat meek derknes be þi mirour & þi mynde hole. Penk no ferþer of þi-self þan I bid þee do of þi God, so þat þou be on wiþ hym in spirit as þus, with-outyn departyng & scatering of mynde. For he 10 is þi being, & in him þou arte þat at þou arte, not only bi cause & bi beyng, bot also he is in þee boþe þi cause & þi beyng. & þerfore penk on God as in þis werk as þou dost on þi-self, & on þi-self as þou dost on God, þat he is as he is & þou arte as þou arte, so þat þi þouȝt be not scaterid ne departid, bot onid in hym þat is 15 al; euermore sauyng þis difference bitwix þee & him, þat he is þi being & þou not his. For þof it be so þat alle þinges ben in hym bi cause & bi beyng & he be in alle þinges here cause & here being, ȝit in him-self only he is his owne cause & his owne being. For as noȝing may be wiþ-outyn him, so may he not be wiþ-outyn 20 him-self. He is being boþe to him-self & to alle. & in þat he is only departid from alle þat he is being boþe of hym-self & of alle; & in þat he is one in alle & alle in him þat alle þinges han her be-25 ings in him & he is being of alle. Þus schal þi þouȝt & þi feling be onid wiþ hym in grace wiþ-outyn departing, alle corious sechinges in þe queinte qualitees of þi blinde beyng or of his fer-put bac; þat þi þouȝt be nakid & þi felyng noȝing defoulid, & þou, nakidly as þou arte, wiþ þe touching of grace be priuely fed in þi felyng only wiþ hym as he is; bot blyndly & in partie, as it may be here in þis liif, þat þi longing desire be euermore worching.

30 Loke up þan liȝtly & sey to þi Lorde, ouþer wiþ mouȝ or

1 & groundid] om. Pa 4 in] om. Pa at] þat Har² Pa 6 more] Lette add. Pa 7 ferþer] ferrer Har 9 &] or Pa scatering] schater- yng Kk of mynde] ins. in margin in a different hand Har¹ 10 þat... arte] ins. Pa at] ins. Har¹ Kk; that Pa 11 boþe] in add. Pa 12 þis] þi Kk Har² 13 &] that add. Pa 14 onid] onehed Har² 15 bitwix] betwixt Pa þee] hym Har² him] þe Har² 16 hym] both add. Har² 20 he is] tr. Kk Har² 21 from] fro Kk Har² is] hys owne add. Har² 22 he is] tr. Kk Har² 23 &] as Kk Har² Pa is] þe add. Kk Har² Pa 25 sechinges] sekyng Kk Har² Pa or of his] om. Pa 26 bac] abacke Pa 26-7 & þi... nakidly] om. Kk 30 or] with (ins.) add. Pa

mening] of hert: 'Pat at I am, Lorde, I offre vnto þee, for þou it f. 93^a arte.' & þenk nakidly, pleynly & boistously þat þou arte as þou arte, wiþ-outyn any maner of corioustē.

Þis is litil maistrie for to þink, ȝif it were bodyn to þe lewdist man or womman þat leuiþ in þe comounist wit of kynde in þis liif, as me þenkiþ. & þerfore softly, mornyngly & smylingly I merueyle me somtyme whan I here sum men sey (I mene not simple lewid men & wommen, bot clerkes [& men] of grete kunning) þat my writyng to þee & to oþer is so harde & so heiȝ, & so curious & so queinte, þat vnneþes it may be conceiuid of þe sotelist clerk 10 or wittid man or womman in þis liif, as þei seyn. Bot to þees men most I answere & sey þat it is moche worþi to be sorowid, & of God & his louers to be mercyfuly scornid & bitterly reprouid, þat now þees dayes not only a fewe folkes, bot generaly niȝhond alle (bot ȝif it be one or two in a contrey of þe specyal chosen of God) 15 ben so bleendid in here coryous kunning of clergie & of kynde þat þe trewe conceite of þis liȝt werk, þorow þe whiche þe boistousest mans soule or wommans in þis liif is verely in louely meeknes onyd to God in parfite charite, may no more, ne ȝit so moche, be conceyuid of hem in soþfastnes of spirit, for her blyndnes & here 20 corioustee, þen may þe kunning of þe grettest clerk in scole of a ȝong childe at his A.B.C. & for þis blyndnes erryngly þei clepin soche simple teching coriouste of witte, whan, ȝif it be witterly lokyd, it schal be founden bot a symple & a liȝt lesson of a lewid man.

25

For I holde him to lewyd & to boistous þat kan not þenk & fele þat him-self is, not what him-self is bot þat hym-self is. For þis is pleynli proprid to þe lewdist kow or to þe moste vnresonable beest (ȝif it miȝt be seide, as it may not, þat one were lewder or more vnresonable þen anoþer) for to fele þe owne propre beyng. 30

1 at] þat Kk Har² Pa 4 bodyn] to be don Pa to] of Pa 5 leuiþ]
lyueþ Kk Har² 6 softly] & add. Kk Har² Pa & smylingly]
om. Har² 8 & men] All MSS. but Har¹ 9 (heiȝ) &] om. Kk Har²
Pa 13 God &] of add. Har² 16 ben] ere Kk Har², are Pa
bleendid] blynded Kk Har² Pa 17 boistousest] lewed add. Kk Har²
Pa 18 wommans] woman Kk Har² Pa 19 verely] is (can.) add. Kk
22 childe] that is add. Pa his] om. Pa clepin] call Pa. So always
23 witterly] vtterly Kk Har² 24 a symple &] om. Pa 26 I] wolde
add. Har² & fele] om. Pa 28 (or) to] om. Pa 30 þe] their, ir ins. Pa

f. 93b Moche more | þan it is proprid to man, þe whiche is singulerly endowid wiþ reson abouen alle oþer beestes, for to þenk & for to fele his owne propre beyng.

& þerfore com doun into þe lowest poynte of þi witte, þe whiche sum man holdeþ by verrey preof þat it is þe hiȝest, & þenk on þe lewedest maner, bot bi sum man þe wisest, not what þi-self is, bot þat þi-self is. For whi to þee for to þenk what þou arte in alle propirte longeþ moche crafte of clergie & of kunning & moche sotil seching in þi kyndely wittys. & þis hast þou done now many day wiþ help of grace, so þat þou wost now as in partie, & as I suppose it is profitable to þee for þe tyme, what þou arte: a man in kind & a foule stinking wreche by synne. þou knowest wel how; & par-audenture þee þenkiþ sumtyme to wele alle þe filþis þat folowen & fallen to a wreche. Fy on hem! Late hem go, I prey þee. Stire no ferþer in hem for ferde of stynche. Bot for to þenk þat þou arte, mayst þou haue of þi lewydnes & þi boistouste wiþ-outyn any grete kunning of clergie or of kynde.

& þerfore, I prey þee, do no more now in þis caas bot þenk boistously þat þou arte as þou arte, be þou neuer so foule ne so wrechid; so þat þou haue before-tymes (as I suppose þou hast) ben lawefuly amendid of alle þi sinnes in special & in general, after þe trewe conseil of Holi Chirche; for elles schalt þou neuer ne none oþer by my consent be so bolde to take apon ȝow þis werk. Bot ȝif þou fele þat þou hast done þat in þee is, þan schalt þou set þee to þis werk. & þof al þou fele þi-self ȝit þan so vile & so wrechid þat for kombraunce of þi-self þou wost not þi-self what is best þee for to do wiþ þi-self, þis þan schalt þou do as I sei þee:

Take good gracyous God as he is, plat & pleyn as a plastre, & legge it to þi seek self as þou arte. Or, ȝif I oþer-wise schal sey,

1 it is] tr. Pa	þe whiche] that Pa	2 endowid] endewed Har ² ,	
enduyd Pa	abouen] wiþ þe (can.) add. Kk	8 propirte] proprietes	
Kk Har ² Pa	9 now] om. Pa	10 many] a add. Har ² Pa	11 day] agon
(ins.) add. Pa	10 wost] wotest Pa	12 as] om. Pa	13 in kind] ins. in
different hand Har ¹	12 foule] om. Har ²	14 to] vnto Har ²	15 ferþer]
ferer Har ²	12 ferde] feere Pa	16 &] of add. Har ²	17 boistouste]
boystousnes Pa	18 no] no (can.) add. Kk	18 so] om. Kk	
suppose] þat add. Kk Har ² Pa	19 (&) in] om. Pa	19 none] any	
Kk Har ² Pa	20 bolde] be my consent (can.) add. Har ¹	21 ȝow] the Pa	
Bot] &, but written above Har ²	21 þee to] vpon Pa	22 ȝof al] tr. Pa	
26 wost] wotest Pa	22 þis] om. Pa	23 legge] ligge Kk Har ² ; ley	
Pa	24 it] hym Har ²	24 -wise] I add. Pa	
it] hym Har ²	25 I] om. Pa	25 -wise] I add. Pa	

bere up þi seek self | as þou arte & fonde for to touche bi desire f. 94a
 good gracious God as he is, þe touching of whome is eendeles helpe
 by witnes of þe womman in þe gospel: Si tetigero vel fimbriam
 vestimenti eius, salua ero. 'If I touche bot þe hemme of his
 cloþing, I schal be saa[f].' Miche more schalt þou þan be maad hole 5
 of þi seeknes for þis heiȝe heuenly touching of his owne beyng, him
 owne dere self. Step up þan stify & taast of þat triacle; bere up þi
 seek self as þou arte vnto gracious God as he is, *with*-outyn any
 corious or special beholdyng to eny of alle þe qualitees þat longyn
 to þe beyng of þi-self or of God, wheþer þei be clene or wrechid, 10
 gracyous or kyndely, godli or manly. It chargeþ not now in þee
 bot þat þi blynde beholdyng of þi nakid beyng be gladli born up
 in listines of loue, to be knittid & onid in grace & in spirit to þe
 precious beyng of God in him-self only as he is, *with*-outen more.

& þof al þat þi wantoun seching wittys kon finde no mete vnto 15
 hem in þis maner of doyng, & þerfore grochingly þei wilens bid þee
 algates to leue of þat werk & do sum good on here corious maner
 (for it semeþ to hem þat it is no þing worþ þat þou dost, & al is for
 þei kan no skile þer-apon), bot I wolde loue it þe betir, for bi þat it
 semiþ þat it is more worþi þen þei ben. & whi schuld I not þan 20
 loue it þe betir, & namely whan þer is [no] werk þat I may do, ne
 þat may be wrouȝt in þe coriouste of any of my wittis, bodely
 or goostly, þat miȝt bring me so ny vnto God & so fer fro þe
 woruld as þis nakid litil felyng & offring up of my blynde beyng
 wold do? 25

& þerfore, al-þof þi wittis kon fynde no mete vnto hem in þis
 werk, & þerfore þei wolde haue þee awey, þit loke þat | þou leue f. 94b
 not for hem, bot be þou here maystre. & go not bak in fedyng of
 hem, be þei neuer so wode. þan gost þou bak in fedyng of þi wittes

1 fonde for] goo abowte Pa 2 helþe] hele Har² 3 gospel] seyng
 þus add. Kk Har² Pa. *The references* Matthew ix and Luke viii are
 given in the left margin of Har¹ 4 tetigero] tegigero Kk 5 vel] om. Pa
 5 saaf] saak Har¹ 6 more] om. Kk 7 him . . . self] om. Pa
 9 corious] curiouste Har² 10 to] of Pa 11 alle] om. Pa 12 wheþer]
 þat add. Har² 13 &] n (can.) add. Har¹ 14 (&) in] om. Pa
 15 þof al] tr. Pa 16 þat] om. Kk Pa 17 20 whi] then add. Pa 18 þan]
 om. Pa 19 21 no] All MSS. but Har¹ 22 23 ny] nere Har² 24 fro]
 from Pa 25 al-] om. Pa 26 27 wolde] þei wolde (can.) add. Har¹
 28 hem] þaim, hem written above Har² 29 here] þaire, here written above
 Har²

whan þou suffrest hem seche in þe diuerse corious meditacions
of þe qualitees of þi beyng; þe whiche medi[t]acions, þof al þei
be ful good & ful profitable, neuerþeles, in comparison of þis
blynde felyng & offring up of þi beyng, þei ben ful diuerse &
5 scateryng from þe perfecion of onheed, þe whiche falliþ for to
be bitwix God & þi soule. & þerfore holde þee before in þe first
poynt of þi spirit, þe whiche is þi beyng; & go not bak for nokyns
þing, seme it neuer so good ne so holy þe þing þat þi wittis wolde
lede þee vnto.

10 & fulfille þe counsel & þe teching of Salamon, seiing þus to his
son: Honora Dominum de tua substancia *et de primiciis frugum*
tuarum da pauperibus: *et inplebuntur horrea tua saturitate et vino*
torcularia redundabunt. 'Worschip þi Lorde wiþ þi substaunce, &
wiþ þe first of þi frutes fede þou þe pore: & þi bernes scholen be fillid
15 wiþ fulheed & þi grape stockes schul rebounde ful of wyne.' þis is
þe text þat Salamon spake to his sone bodely, as ȝif he had seyde to
þin vnderstanding, as I schal sey in his persone vnto þee goostly:

18 'þou goostly frende in God, loke þat alle corious seching in þi
kyndely wittys left, þou do hole worschip to þi Lorde God wiþ þi
20 substaunce, offring up vnto him pleinly & holy þin owne self, al
þat þou arte & soche as þou arte, bot generaly & not specyaly,
(þat is, wiþ-outen specyal beholdyng to þat þat þou arte), þat þi siȝt
be not scaterid ne þi felyng defoulid, þe whiche wolde make þee les
on wiþ þi God in purete of spirit. & wiþ þe first of þi frutes fede
25 þou þe pore; þat is wiþ þe first of þi goostly or bodely qualitees, þe
f. 95a whiche ben | growen vp wiþ þee fro þe first byginnynge of þi
makynge into þis day.'

Alle þe ȝiftes of kynde & of grace þat euer God ȝauë þee, I clepe
hem þi frutes, wiþ þe whiche þou art holden to fostre & fede in

I þe] om. Pa 2 medit-] medid- Har¹ þof al] tr. Pa 3 be]
some tyme add. Kk Har² Pa (& ful] om. Har² neuerþeles] ȝit
add. Har² 4 blynde] fle (can.) add. Kk ben] are Kk Har² Pa
5 from] fro Kk Har² perfecion of] om. Pa 6 bitwix] betwixt
Pa 7 þe] om. Pa nokyns] nokyn Kk Har² Pa 8 þing]
þat may be falle add. Har² 10 The reference Proverbs iii is given
in the left margin of Har¹ 13 torcularia] tua add. Pa 14 pore] pure
Har² 15 ful] om. Kk Har² Pa 17 in his . . . þee] om. Pa þee]
at þis tyme add. Har² 22 specyal] om. Har² 25 pore] pure Har²
wiþ] om. Kk 26 fro] from Pa 27 in-] vn- Har² Pa 29 holden]
bownde Pa

þis liif, boþe bodily & goostly, as wel alle þi breþren & sistren in kynde & in grace as þou arte þin owne propre self. þe first of þees ȝiftes clepe I þe first of þi frutes. þe first ȝift in iche creature is only þe being of þe same creature. For þof it be so þat þe qualitees of þi beyng ben so fast onyd to þe self beyng as þei ben wiþ-outyn 5 departyng, ȝit, for þei hangen alle upon it, verely it may be clepid, as it is, þe first of þi ȝiftes. & þus it is only þi beyng þat is þe first of þi frutes. For ȝif þou breide oute þe corious beholding of þin hert to eny or to alle þe sotil qualitees & þe worþi condicions þat fallen to þe being of man, þe whiche is þe nobelist beyng of maad 10 þinges, euermore þou schalt fynde þat þe first poynte & þe pricke of þi beholding, what-so-euer it be, is þi nakid being. As ȝif þou seidest þus in þi-self in ich one of þi beholdinges, stering þi-self by þe menes of þis beholding to þe loue & þe preising of þi Lorde God þat not only ȝaue þee to be, bot so nobli to be as þe qualitees 15 of þi beyng wolen witnes in þi beholding, seiing þus: 'I am & I see & fele þat I am, & not only I am, bot so I am & so & so & so & so,' rekenyng up in þi beholding alle þe qualitees of þi beyng in special. & þan, þat more þen al þis is, lap up alle þis in general & sey þus: 'þat at I am & how þat I am, as in kynde & in grace, alle I 20 haue it of þee, Lord, & þou it arte. & al I offre it vnto þee principally to þe preising of þee, for þe help of alle myn euyn-Cristen & of me.' & | þus maist þou se þat þe first & þe poynte of þi be- f. 95b holding is moste substancialy set in þe nakid siȝt & þe blynde felyng of þin owne being. & þus it is only þi being þat is þe first 25 of þi frutes.

Bot þof al it be þe first of ich one of þi frutes, & þof al þat þe oþer frutes hangyn alle vpon it, ȝit it spedijþ not now in þis caas to lap ne to cloþe þi beholding to it in eny or in alle, þe corious qualitees of it, þe whiche I clepe þi frutes & in whiche þou hast ben 30

1 breþren] brether Har²; brotherne Pa sistren] susterne Pa
 2 þees] þese (can.), þis Kk 3 þe] om. Kk iche] euery Pa 4 (of)
 þe] þat Kk Har² Pa same] om. Pa be so] tr. Har² 5 onyd]
 onehed Har² to] wiþ Kk Har² Pa as] that Pa 7 þi] fruytes
 (can.) add. Kk 13 ich] euery Pa 14 &] to add. Pa 16 &] om. Pa
 16-17 see &] I add. Kk Har² 17 & so] om. Kk Har² Pa 19 (alle)
 þis] om. Pa 20 at] om. Kk Har² Pa 21 it] om. Pa 25 & þus
 . . . being] om. Pa 27 þof al] tr. Pa ich] euery Pa þat] om.
 Pa þe] thy Pa 28 frutes] om. Pa hangyn] hyngen Kk Har²
 alle] om. Pa

trauailid before þis tyme. Bot it suffisiþ now vnto þee to do hole worschip vnto God wiþ þi substaunce & for to offre up þi nakid beyng, þe whiche is þe first of þi frutes, in contynowel sacrificiȝe of preising of God, boþe for þi-self & for alle oþer as charite askiþ, 5 vncloþid with eny qualite or special beholding þat on eny maner falliþ or may falle vnto þe beyng of þi-self or of any oþer, as þou woldest by þat beholding help þe nede, forþer þe spede, or encresse þe profite to perfeccion of þi-self or of eny oþer. Lat be þis: it wil not be þus in þis caas trewly. For it profitiþ more soche a blynde 10 comoun beholding to þe nede, þe spede, & þe perfeccion of þi-self & of alle oþer in purete of spirit þen any special beholding þat eny man may haue, seme it neuir so holy.

þis is soþ by witnes of Scripture, bi ensaumple of Crist & bi quik reson. For as alle men weren lost in Adam, for he fel fro þis onyng 15 affeccion, & as alle, þat wiþ werk acordyng to here clepyng wol witnes here wille of saluacion, ben sauid & schul be by þe vertewe of þe Passion of only Crist, offring him-self up in verreiest sacrificiȝe, f. 96a al þat he was in general & not in | specyal, wiþ-outyn special beholding to any o man in þis liif, bot generaly & in comon for 20 alle: riȝt so a verey & a parfite sacrificer of him-self þus by a comon entent vnto alle doþ þat in him is to knit alle men to God as effectuely as him-self is.

& more charite may no man do þen þus to sacrifice him-self for alle his breþren & sistren in grace & in kynde. For as þe soule is 25 more worþi þen þe body, so þe knittyng of þe soule to God (þe liif of it) by þe heuenly fode of charite is betir þan þe knittyng of þe body to þe soule (þe liif of it) bi eny erþli fode in þis liif. Þis is good for to do bi it-self bot with-outyn þe toþer it is neuer weel done. 30 Þis & þe toþer is þe betir; bot þe toþer by it-self is þe best. For þis bi it-self deserueþ neuer saluacion; bot þe toþer bi it-self,

1 vnto] to Pa 3 sacrificiȝe] sacrifice Kk Har² Pa 5 vn-] can.,
not written above Pa 9 soche] a beholding (can.) add. Har¹ 10 (nedē)
þe] om. Pa 14 lost] lorne Kk fel] om. Pa fro] from Pa 15 affec-
cion] departed add. Pa 17 of] & Kk Har² of only] tr. Pa
in] þe add. Kk sacrificiȝe] sacrifice Kk Har² Pa 18 wiþ-outyn special]
om. Pa 20 sacrificer] sacrificer Har² 21 is] his Kk 22 effect-]
affect- Har² 23 sacrificiȝe] sacrifice Kk Har² 24 breþren] brethre
Har²; brotherne Pa sistren] susterne Pa &] ins. Har¹ 29 -self]
one Kk Har² 30 -self] one Kk Har² deserueþ . . . itself] om.
Pa -self] one Kk Har²

where þe plente of þis defailiþ, deseruiþ not only saluacion bot ledeþ to þe grettist perfeccion.

For it nediþ not now in encrese of þi perfeccion to go bak in fedyng of þi wittys, as it is in beholdingyng of þe qualitees of þi beyng, so þat þou miȝtest by soche beholdingyng fede & fille þin 5 affeccion wiþ louely & likyng felynges in God & goostly þinges, & þin vnderstandingyng wiþ goostly wisdome of holy meditacions in seching after þe knowyng of God. For, ȝif þou wilt holde þee besily, as þou maist by grace, euermore contynowly in þe first poynte of þi spirit, offring up vnto God þat nakid blynde felyng of 10 þin owne beyng, þe whiche I clepe þe first of þi frutes, sekir be þou þat þe toþer hynder ende of Salamons lesson schal be ful verrely fulfillid as he hoteþ, wiþ outen besines of þi-self in corious seching & ransakyng wiþ þi goostly wittis amonges eny of þe qualitees þat longin not only to þe beyng of þi-self bot also to þe 15 beyng of God.

For wite þou riȝt wel þat in | þis werk þou schalt no more f. 96b beholdingyng haue to þe qualitees of þe being of God þan to þe qualitees of þe beyng of þi-self. For þer is no name, ne felyng ne beholdingyng more, ne so moche, acordyng vnto euer-lastyngnes, 20 þe whiche is God, as is þat þe whiche may be had, seen & felt in þe blinde & þe louely beholding of þis worde IS. For ȝif þou sey 'Good' or 'Faire Lorde', or 'Swete', 'Merciful' or 'Riȝtwise', 'Wise' or 'Alwitty', 'Miȝti' or 'Almiȝti', 'Witte' or 'Wisdome', 'Miȝte' or 'Strengþe', 'Loue' or 'Charite', or what oþer soche 25 þing þat þou sey of God: al it is hid & enstorid in þis litil worde IS. For þat same is to him only to be, þat is alle þees for to be. & ȝif þou put to an hundrid þousand soche swete wordes as ben þees—good, faire & alle þees oþer—ȝit ȝedest þou not fro þis worde IS. & ȝif þou sey hem alle, þou puttest not to it. & ȝif þou sey riȝt none, 30

1 bot] also add. Har² 3 not] om. Pa encrese] incressyng Har² Pa
 5 beholdingyng] behodynge Har² 6 God &] in add. Kk 7 of] & Kk
 10 up] to (can.) add. Kk 12 Salamons] Salamon Kk Har² ful] om.
 Pa 13 hoteþ] heteþ Kk Har²; behetythe Pa corious] curiosite of
 Pa 14 amonges] amang Kk Har² Pa 15 longin] belonge Pa of
 god (can.) add. Kk 19 name] nome Har² 22 þe] om. Pa 23 Swete]
 or add. Har² 24 Alwitty] alle wytte Kk Alwitty, Miȝti or] om. Pa
 Almiȝti] witty add. Pa 26 it] om. Pa 28 to] om. Kk Har² Pa
 hundrid] hundreþ Kk Har² 29 faire] & swete add. Har² ȝedest]
 ȝode Har² fro] from Pa þis] little add. Pa 30 hem alle . . .
 & ȝif þou sey] om. Kk riȝt] can. Pa

þou takist not fro it. & þerfore be as blynde in þe louely beholding of þe beyng of þi God as in þe nakid beholding of þe beyng of þi-self, wiþ-outyn eny corious seching in þi wittys to loke after eny qualite þat longeþ to his being or to þine. Bot alle corioustē left 5 & fer put bak, do worship to þi God with þi substānce, al þat þou arte þat þou arte vnto alle him þat is as he is, þe whiche only of him-self, wiþ-outyn moo, is þe blisful being boþe of him-self & of þee.

& þus schalt þou knittingly, & in a maner þat is meruelous, 10 worship God wiþ him-self; for þat þou arte þou hast of him & he it is. & þof al þou haddest a biginnynge in þi substāncyal creacion, þe whiche was sumtyme nouȝt, ȝit haþ þi being ben euer-more in hym wiþ-outyn beginnyng & euir schal be wiþ-outyn ending, as him-self is. & þerfore oft I crie, & euer upon one: |

f. 97a 15 'Do worship to þi God with þi substānce, & comoun profite to alle þat ben men wiþ þe first of þi frutes; & þan schul þi bernes be fulfillid with fulheed.' þat is, þan schal þi gostly affeccion be fillid with þe fulheed of loue & of vertuous leuyng in God, þi grounde & þi purete of spirit. '& þi grape-stockes scholen rebounde 20 ful of wyne.' þat is, þin inward goostly wittis, þe whiche þou arte wonte for to streine & presse to-geders bi diuerse corious meditacions & resonable inuestigacions abouten þe goostly knowing of God & þi-self in beholding of his qualitees & of þine, scholen þan rebounde ful of wyne. By þe whiche wine in Holy 25 Scripture is verrely & mistely vnderstonden goostly wisdome in verrey contemplacion & heȝ sauour of þe Godheed.

& al þis schal be done sodenly, listely & gracyously, wiþ-outyn besines or trauaile of þi-self, only by þe mynistracion of aungelles þorow vertewe of þis louely blinde werk. For vnto it alle

1 fro] from Pa 2 þe] þi Kk 3 beholding] behodynge Har² 4 (or) to] om. Har² 5 þi] om. Pa þat] om. Har² 6 þat] as Kk Har² Pa alle] om. Pa 7 mooȝ more Pa blis-] blyst- Har² 9 a] om. Har² 10 hast] it add. Kk Har² Pa 11 þof al] tr. Pa þi] the Pa 12 -more] om. Pa; wiþ h (can.) add. Har¹ 13 euir] more add. Har² 15 &] for the Pa to] of Pa 16 men] & feede the poore add. Pa 17 ful-] om. Pa affeccion] affe- cions Kk Har² Pa 18 leuing] lykyng Kk Har² Pa þi] the Pa 21 &] to add. Pa -geders] -gydre Kk Har²; -gyther Pa 23 &] of (ins.) add. Pa (&) of] om. Pa 24 þan] om. Kk Har² Pa 26 of] in Pa 28-9 aungelles] Angel Kk 29 þorow] þe add. Kk Har² Pa louely blinde] tr. Pa

aungelles knowing done special seruise as þe maiden vnto þe lady.

In grete comendacion of þis listi sleiȝt worching, þe whiche in it-self is þe heiȝ wisdom of þe Godheed graciousli descendyng into mans soule, knitting it & onyng it vnto him-self in goostly sleiȝt & 5 prudence of spirit, þe wise man Salamon brestip up & seiþ:

Beatus homo qui inuenit sapienciam et qui affluit prudencia. Melior est adquisicio eius negociacione auri et argenti. Primi et purissimi fructus eius. Custodi, fili mi, legem atque consilium; et erit vita anime tue et gracia faucibus tuis. Tunc ambulabis 10 fiducialiter in via tua, et pes tuus non inpinget. Si dormieris, non timebis; quiesces et suauis erit sompnus tuus. Ne paureas repentina terrore, et irruent[e]s tibi potencias impiorum, quia Dominus erit in latere tuo et custodiet pedem tuum ne capiaris. Alle þis is to þin vnderstandingy þus: He is a blisful man þat may fynde þis onyng 15 wisdom & þat may abounde in his | goostly worching wiþ þis f. 97b louely sleiȝt & prudence of spirit, in offring up of his owne blynde feling of his owne beyng, alle corious kunningyng of clergie & of kynde fer put bak. Þe purchasing of þis goostly wisdom & þis sleiȝt worching is betir þan þe getyng of golde or of siluer. By þe 20 whiche gold & siluer is moraly vnderstonden al oþer bodely & goostly knowyng, þe whiche is getyn bi corious seching & worching in oure kyndely wittis beneþe us, wiþ-inne vs or euen with us, in beholdyng of eny of þe qualitees þat longyn to þe beyng of God or of eny create þing. & whi is it beter, he putteþ to þe cause & 25 seiþ: for primi et purissimi fructus eius. Þat is: 'for first and purest ben þe frutes of it.' & no wonder, for whi þe frute of þis worching is hiȝe goostly wisdom, sodenly & frely riftid of þe spirit inly in it-self & vnformid, ful fer fro fantasie, impossible to be streinid or to falle vnder þe worching of naturele witte. Þe whiche naturele 30

1 done] doþ Kk Har² Pa maiden] madens Kk Har² Pa -to] om.
 Kk 3 sleiȝt] sleyȝ Kk Har² Pa 5 sleiȝt] sleyȝ Pa 7 The reference
 Proverbs iii is given in the right margin of Har¹ qui] ins. in margin
 Har¹ 8 negociacione] negacionacione Har¹ 12 tuus] Et add. Pa
 13 -es] Har¹ has the unique reading -as 15 blis-] blysst- Har² 19 bak]
 abacke Pa. &] of add. Kk Har² Pa 20 golde . . . siluer] tr.,
 but order corrected Har¹ or] & Kk Har² Pa 22 getyn] gotten Pa
 22-3 worching] b (can.) add. Har¹ 23 in] of Kk 25 is it] tr. Pa
 26 for] Quia Har² 27 ben] of Kk; er Har², are Pa þis] goostly
 (can.) add. Har¹ 28 riftid] reyzed Kk Har² Pa

witte, be it neuer so sotyl ne so holy, may be clepid in comparison of þis bot feynid foly formyd in fantome, as fer fro þe verrey soþfastnes whan þe goostly sonne schiniþ as is þe derknes of þe mone-schine in a mist at midwinters niȝt fro þe briȝtnesse of þe sonne-5 beme in þe clerest tyme of missomer day.

‘Kepe, my sone’, he seiþ, ‘þis lawe & þis conseil’ in þe whiche alle þe comaundementes & þe counselle, as wel of þe Olde Testament as of þe Newe, ben verely & parfitely fulfillid, with-outyn any special beholdyng to any one singulerly in it-self. & on oþer 10 wise is not þis maner of worching clepid a lawe, bot for it conteneþ in it fully alle þe braunches & þe frutes of þe lawe. For ȝif it be witterly lokid, þe grounde & þe strengþe of þis worching | f. 98a schal be seen nouȝt elles bot þe glorious ȝifte of loue, in þe whiche, by þe teching of þe apostle, alle þe lawe is fulfillid: Plenitudo legis 15 est dileccio. ‘þe fulheed of þe lawe is loue.’

& þis louely lawe & þis liuely counseil, ȝif þou kepe it, as Salamon seiþ, ‘schal be liif to þi soule’ wiþ-inne in softnes of loue to þi God, ‘& grace to þi chekis’ with-outyn in þe trewest teching & þe semeliest gouernaunce of þi bodely beryng in outward 20 forme of leuing to þin euyn-Cristen. & in þees two, þe tone wiþ-inne & þe toþer wiþ-outyn, by þe teching of Crist, ‘hangeþ alle þe lawe & þe profeȝies’: In hiis enim duob[us] tota lex pendet et prophete: scilicet dileccio dei et proximi.

& þerfore, whan þou arte maad þus parfite in þi worching boþe 25 wiþ-inne & wiþ-outyn, þen schalt þou goo tristely groundid in grace, þe gide of þi goostly wey, loueli lifting up þi nakid blinde beyng to þe blisful beyng of þi God, þe whiche ben bot one in grace þof al ȝe ben diuerse in kynde. ‘& þe fote of þi loue schal not sporne.’ þat is to sey, from þou haue þe preue of þi goostly werk in

2 as] & Kk Har² Pa fro] from Pa 3 goostly] godly Kk Har²
 Pa is] om. Kk Har² Pa 4 -winters] -wynter Kk Har² Pa
 5 -somer] -somers Kk Har² Pa 6 he] he add. Kk 9 in] by Pa 10 wit-
 om. Pa 10-11 bot...lawe] om. Kk 10 for] bycawse Pa 12 witterly] wisely Pa 13 glorious] gracious Har² 14 þe] om. Kk Har². The
 incorrect reference, Romans iii, is given in the left margin of Har¹ 15 di-
 leccio] þat is add. Har² 16 liuely] louely Pa 17 be] loue (can.) add. Kk
 22 profeȝies] prophetes Pa 23 dileccio] dileccione Har² Pa 25 tristely] trustely Pa 27 blis-]
 28 þof al] tr. Pa; þat add. Har² 3e] they Pa
 29 from] Fro Kk Har², the tyme add. Pa haue] geten add. Kk Har²;
 gotten add. Pa

continowaunce of spirit, þan schalt þou not so liȝtly be lettyd & drawen bāc by þe corious questions of þi sotil wittys, as þou arte now in þi begynnnyng. Or elles þus: þen schal þe fote of þi loue neiþer snapir ne sporne on eni maner of fantasie causid of þi corious seching in þi wittys. For whi vtterly in þis werk, as it is, seide before, is al corious seching in any of þi kyndeli wittis fer put bak & fully forȝeten for ferde of fantasie or any feinid fals-heed þat may falle in þis liif, þe whiche in þis werk miȝt defoule þe nakid felyng of þi blynde beyng & drawe þee awey fro þe worþines of þis werk.

10

For ȝif eny maner of special þouȝt of any þing, bot only of þi nakyd blinde beyng (þe whiche is þi God & þin entent), | come in f. 98b þi mynde, þen arte þou awey & drawen bac to worche in þe sleȝt & þe coriouste of wittys, in scatering & departyng of þee & of þi mynde boþe fro þee & þi God. & þerfore holde þee hole & 15 vns caterid as forþ as þou maist bi grace & bi sleȝt of goostly contynowaunce. For in þis blinde beholding of þi nakid beyng, þus onyd to God as I telle þee, schalt þou do al þat þou schalt do: ete & drink, sleep & wake, go & sit, speke & be stille, ligge & rise, stonde & knele, renne & ride, trauaile & rest. Þis schalt þou 20 iche day offre up vnto God as for þe moste precious offring þat þou canst make. & it schal be þe cheef of alle þi doynges, [in alle þi doynges,] wheþer þei be actyue or contemplatyue. For, as Salamon seiþ in þis processe, 'ȝif þou slepe' in þis blynde beholding from al þe noise & þe steryng of þe fel fende, þe fals woreld & þe frell 25 flessche, 'þou schalt not drede any peril' ne any deceytle of þe feende. For whi vtterly in þis werk he is masid & maad blynde in a peynful vnknowyng & a wood wondryng to wite what þou doost. Bot no force þerof, for 'þou schalt gracyously rest' in þis

3 now] om. Kk Har² Pa þi] þe Kk Har² Pa 4 neiþer] nother
 Pa snapir] swaper Har² þi] þe Har²; om. Pa 7 -ȝeten]
 -gotten Pa ferde] feere Pa 9 þe] þi Kk Har² Pa; blynge (can.)
 add. Har² fro] from Pa 12 blinde] om. Kk Har² Pa in]
 to add. Pa 14 &] in add. Kk Har² Pa þe] om. Pa of] thy add.
 Pa 15 fro] from Pa þi] from Pa (hole) &] om. Kk Har² Pa
 16 as] fer add. Har² Pa 19 ligge] lyg Har²; lye Pa 20 stonde . . .
 rest] om. Pa renne] rynne Kk Har² iche] euery Pa 21 vnto] þi add.
 Har² for] om. Pa 22 þe] om. Pa 22-3 in . . . doynges] The reading
 of all MSS. except Har¹ 23 wheþer] þat add. Har² 24 þis] his Pa
 from] fro Kk Har² 25 noise] nose Kk 27 masid] amasyd Pa
 29 gracyously rest] tr., but order corrected Har¹

louely onheed of God & þi soule; ' & þi sleep schal be ful softe', for it schal be goostly fode & inly strengþe, as wel to þi body as to þi soule. As þis same Salamon seiþ sone after: Vniuerse carni sanitas est. 'It is helþe to al þe freelite & þe seeknes of flesche.' & worþely; 5 for siþ al seeknes & corupcion fel into þe flesche whan þe soule fel fro þis werk, þan schal alle helþe come to þe flesche whan þe soule bi þe grace of Jhesu, þe whiche is þe cheef worcher, riseþ to þis same werk aȝein. & þis schalt þou hope only to haue by þe mercy of Jhesu & þi louely consent. & þerfore I preie þee, wiþ 10 Salamon here in þis processe, þat þou stonde stify in þis werk, euermore beryng up vnto hym þi louely consent in listines of loue. f. 99a Et ne paureas repentina terrore | et irruentes tibi potencias impiorum. ' & be not astonyed' wiþ any vnrestful drede, þof þe feend (as he wol) come 'wiþ a sodeyn feerdnes', bussching & 15 betyng on þe walles of þin house þere þou sittest, or þof he stire any of his miȝty lemys to rise & 'to renne in apon þee' sodenly, as it is wiþ-outyn any auysement. þus schal it be, wite þou riȝt wel, þou what-so-euer þat þou be þat settyst þee to worche trewly in þis werk, þou schalt verrely see & fele, or elles smel, taste or 20 here som astoniing maad by þe feende in some of þi fyue wittys wiþ-outyn. & al is done for to drawe þee downe fro þe heiȝt of þis precious worching. & þerfore take good kepe of þin herte in tyme of þis tourment, & lene wiþ a tristi listines to þe loue of oure Lorde.

25 Quia Dominus erit in latere tuo, et custodiet pedem tuum ne capiariſ. þat is: 'for oure Lorde schal be in þi side', redy & neiȝ to þin help, ' & he schal kepe þi fote', þat is, þe stiing up of þi loue bi þe whiche þou gost to God, 'so þat þou schalt not be

1 of] þi lorde add. Har² 3 same] om. Kk Har² Pa sone after] om. Kk. *The reference Proverbs iv is given in the right margin of Har¹* 4 helþe] hele Har² þe] þi Har² þe] ins. in right margin Har¹ of] þe add. Kk Har² Pa 5 siþ] sen Har² into] to Pa 5-6 þe soule . . . whan] ins. at foot of column in Har¹ 6 fro] from Pa 8 þis] þe Kk Har² Pa 10 here] om. Pa 13 &] That is Pa astonyed] astonished Kk Har² Pa 15 betyng] beryng Kk walles] wowes Kk; woulles, wowes written in margin Har² þere] as add. Pa 16 renne] runne Pa in] om. Har² Pa 17 is] were Pa any] ins. Pa þou] that Pa 18 þat] om. Pa 20 astoniing] astonyng Kk Har² þi] þees Kk Har² Pa 21 done] fro (can.) add. Har² fro] from Pa 22 in] þe add Kk Har² Pa 23 tristi] trusty Pa 28 God] gostly add. Har²

takyn' by no sleiȝt ne gile of þin enemyes, þe feend & his fautours, þe woreld & þi flessche. Lo! frende, þus schal oure Lorde & oure loue miȝtely, wisely & goodly sokoure, kepe & defende alle þoo þat for loue-trist þat þei fele in hym wylen vtterly forsake þe kepyng of hem-self.

5

Bot where schal soche a soule be founden so frely fastnyd & foundid in þe feiȝ, so fully mekid *in nouȝtning* of it-self & so louely led & fed in þe loue of oure Lorde, wiȝ ful knowing & felyng of his almiȝtyness, his vnewetyn *wisdom* & his glorious goodness: hou he is one in alle & alle in hym, in so mochil þat, wiȝ- 10 outy[n] ful ȝeeldyng up vnto hym al þat of hym is, by hym & in hym, a louyng soule is neuermore verely mekyd in ful nouȝtning of it-self; so þat for þis nobil nouȝtning of it-self in *verrey meeknes* & þis hyȝe allying of God *in parfite* | charite, it deserueþ to haue f. 99b God (in whose loue it is deeply drenchid in ful & in fynal forsakyn 15 of it-self as nouȝt or lesse, ȝif lesse myȝt be) miȝtely, wisely & goodly sokouryng it & kepyng it & defendyng it fro alle aduersitees, bodily & goostly, wiȝ-outyn besynes or trauavle, rewarde or auisement of it-self?

Lateþ be ȝoure manly obieccions, ȝe half-mekyd soulys, & 20 seiȝ not in ȝoure resonable trasing þat soche a meek & an vtter forsakyn of þe kepyng of a mans self, whan he felij hym þus touchid bi grace, is any temtyng of God, for ȝe fele in ȝoure reson þat ȝe dor not do so ȝowre-self. N[o], holde ȝow payed wiȝ ȝoure parte, for it suffiseþ to þe sauynge of ȝoure soules in actyue degree, 25 & late *oper* contemplatyue soulis alone þat doren. & muse ȝe not & merueyle ȝou not of here wordes & of here werkes, þof al ȝou þenk hem passe þe cours & þe comoun dome of ȝoure reson.

O, for schame! hou ofte schul ȝe rede & here, & neijer ȝeue feiȝ

3 þoo] those Pa 4 loue] louely Pa trist] trust Pa 7 nouȝt-
nyng] nouȝtynynng Kk; nowghtyng Pa 8 ful] fully Pa 9 of] om.
Pa almiȝt-] almyȝt- Kk 11 ful] om. Har² 12 -more] om.
Pa nouȝtning] nowghtyng Pa 13 nouȝtning] nouȝteyng Har²;
nowghting Pa 15 (&) in] om. Kk Har² Pa 16 or] & Pa ȝif]
it add. Kk Har² Pa 17 &] om. Kk Har² Pa fro] from Pa
22 forsakyn] forsaken Kk mans] man Kk 24 No] Har¹ has the
unique reading ne 25 parte] partie Kk 26 contemplatyue] con-
templatyues Kk Har² & muse ȝe not] om. Har² muse] invise Pa
27 ȝou] þu Kk þof al] tr. Pa ȝou] ye Pa 28 passe] passyng Kk
Har² Pa 29 neijer] nother Pa

ne credence þerto? I mene þe þing þat alle oure olde Faders han
wretyn & tauȝt before us, & þe þing whiche is þe frute & þe floure
of alle Holy Scripture. Ouþer it semip þat ȝe ben blynde &
mowen not with bileue se þat ȝe rede or here; or elles ȝe ben
5 touchid with sum priue spice of enuye, þat ȝe mowe not trist so
grete good to falle to ȝoure breþren for ȝe lackiþ it ȝoure-self. It is
good ȝe be ware, for ȝoure enmye is sotyl & in purpose to make ȝow
to ȝeue more feiþ to ȝoure owne witte þan to olde teching of trewe
Faders or to þe worching of grace & þe wille of oure Lorde.

10 How ofte haue ȝe red & herde, & of hou many boþe holy, wise
& trewe, þat as sone as Beniamyn was borne his moder Rachel
deied? By Beniamyn contemplacion, by Rachel we vnder-
stonden reson. & as sone as a soule is touchid wiþ verrey con-
f. 100a templacion, as it is in þis | noble nouȝtning of it-self & þis hiȝe
15 allyng of God, sekerly & verrely þan diȝeþ alle mans reson. & siþen
ȝe reden þis so ofte, not only of one or of two but of ful many ful
holy & ful worþi, whi beleuyn ȝe not it? & ȝif ȝe beleuyn it, how
dore ȝe þan ransake & seche wiþ ȝoure reson in þe wordes & þe
dedes of Beniamyn? By þe whiche Beniamyn ben vnderstonden
20 alle þoo þat in excesse of loue ben rauisc[h]id abouen mynde, þe
prophete seiing þus: Ibi Beniamyn adul[es]centulus in mentis
excessu. Þat is to sey: 'þere is Beniamyn, a ȝong childe, in excesse
of mynde.' Loke þerfore þat ȝe be not liche to þoo wreichid wom-
men in body þat sleen here owne children whan þei ben newe
25 borne. Beeþ ware, it is good, & setteþ not þe poynte of ȝoure pre-
sumptuous spere at þe miȝt, þe witte & þe wille of oure Lorde,
stifly in þat þat in ȝow is, & for blyndenes & lackyng of experi-
ence, as ȝe wolde bere hym down whan ȝe wene best to holde him up.

1 þe] that Pa 2 tauȝt] tecched Kk Har² Pa before us] tr.
Pa 2-3 & þe þing . . . Scripture] om. Kk frute . . . floure] tr. Har² Pa
3 Holy] om. Pa 5 trist] trust Pa; þat (can.) add. Har¹ 6 breþren]
brothern Pa for] bycause Pa lackiþ] wanteþ Kk Har² 7 good]
that add. Pa &] is add. Kk Har² Pa 8 to] om. Kk Har² Pa
10 The reference Genesis xxxv is given in the right margin of Har¹ 12 con-
templacion] & add: Kk Har² Pa 14 þis] om. Pa nouȝtning] nowght-
ing Pa hiȝe] om. Pa 15 sekerly] surely Pa verrely] ryȝt
add. Kk Har² Pa siþen] sen Har² 16 þis] þus Kk Har² Pa
(or of] ins. Pa 18 wiþ] in add. Kk Har² Pa in] om. Pa
20 þoo] those Pa 21 adolesc-] adoloc- Har¹ 22 a] þe Har²
23 þoo] those Pa 24 sleen] kyllen Kk Har² Pa 25 not] ȝoure
presump- (can.) add. Har¹

For siþ in þe first biginnyng of Holy Chirche in þe tyme of persecucion, dyuerse soules & many weren so merueylously touchid in sodeynte of grace þat sodenly, wiþ-outyn menes of oþer werkes comyng before, þei kasten here instrumentes, men of craftes, of here hondes, children here tables in þe scole, & ronnen wiþ-outyn 5 ransakyng of reson to þe martirdom wiþ seintes: whi schul men not trowe now, in þe tyme of pees, þat God may, kan & wile & doþ—þe! touche diuerse soules as sodenly with þe grace of contemplacion? & þis I trowe he wil do ful gracyously in chosyn soulis. For he wol worþely be knownen in þe eende, to þe wondryng 10 of alle þe woreld. For soche a soule, þus loueliche nouȝtning it-self | & þus heily allying his God, schal ful gracyously be kept from f. 100b alle castyng doun of his goostly or bodely enemyes, wiþ-outyn besines & trauaile of it-self, only by þe goodnes of God; as þe godly reson askiþ, þat he trewly kepe alle þoo þat for besines 15 aboute hys loue forsakiþ & list not kepe hem-self. & no wonder þof þei be meruelously kept, for þei ben so fully mekyd in booldnes & strengþeed of loue.

& who-so dar not do þis, [& seiþ aȝens þis,] ouþer þe deuil is in his brest & reuiþ him þe loue-trist þat he schuld haue to his God 20 & þe weel-wilnes þat he schuld haue to his euen-Cristen; or elles he is not ȝit as parfityly mekid as hym nedid to be, I mene ȝif he purpose to þat liif þat is verrey contemplatyue. & þerfore be þou not abasched þus to be mekid to þi Lorde, ne þus for to slepe in þis blynde beholdyng of God as he is, from alle þe noise of 25 þis wickid woreld, þe fals feende & þi frele flesche; for oure

1 siþ] sen Har²; that add. Pa þe (tyme)] om. Pa 3 werkes] worke
 Pa 4 kasten] did cast Pa craftes] crafte Pa of] from Pa
 5 hondes] & add. Pa -outyn] ony add. Har² 6 whi] than add. Pa
 6-7 men not] tr. Kk Har² Pa 7 þe] om. Pa 8 touche] toucheþ
 Kk Har² Pa 8-10 as sodenly . . . soulis] om. Har² 9 he wil] tr.
 Kk Pa 11 nouȝtning] nouȝtynge Har² Pa 12 his] lorde add.
 Har² from] fro Kk Har² 13 goostly . . . bodely] tr. Pa or] & Har²
 15 þoo] those Pa 16 forsakiþ &] om. Pa 17 þof] if Har² ben]
 are Kk, er Har² so] om. Kk Har² Pa 18 strengþeed] strengþed Kk;
 strengþeþ, d ins. Har²; strengþeþ Pa 19 & seiþ . . . þis] *The reading of all*
MSS. except Har¹ 20 &] or Har² reuiþ] takyth from Pa loue]
 louely Pa trist] trust Pa 21 weel] goode Kk Har² Pa wilnes]
 wille Kk Har² Pa 22 as parfityly] om. Har² mekid] so parfytely
 add. Har² nedid] nedeþ Har² Pa 24 abasched] abayst Kk Har²
 25 from] for Kk Pa; fro Har²

Lorde schal be redy to help þee & kepe þi fote þat þou be not takyn.

& wel is þis werk licnyd to a slepe. For as in þe slepe þe vse of þe bodely wittys is cesid, þat þe body may take his ful rest in 5 fedyng & in strengþing of þe bodyly kynde; riȝt so in þis goostly sleep þe wantoun uestyngs of þe wilde goostly wittys, ymaginatyue resonys, ben fast bounden & vtterly voidid, so þat þe sely soule may softly sleep & rest in þe louely beholding of God as he is, in ful fedyng & strengþing of þe goostly kynde.

10 & þerfore bynde in þi wittys in offryng up of þis nakid blynde felyng of þin owne beyng. & loke euer, as I ofte sey, þat it be nakid & not clad wiþ any qualite of þi beyng. For ȝif þou cloþe it wiþ any qualite, as wiþ þe worþines of þi beyng or wiþ any oþer priue condycion þat falliþ to þe beyng of man forby þe beyng of f. 101a 15 eny oþer creature, þan as fast þou ȝeuest mete | to þi wittys, by þe whiche þei han occasyon & a strengþe to drawe þee to many þinges, & so to be scaterid, þou woste neuer how. Beware bi þis disceite, I prey þee.

Bot now, parauenture, at þe sotil examinacion of þi corious 20 wittys, bi-cause þei kun no skyle in þis werk, þou merueylist þee in maner of þis werk, & hast it suspecte. & þat is no wonder; for þou hast ben ȝit hedirtoward ouer wise in þi wittys to kun any skyle of any soche doyng. & parauenture þou askyst in þin herte how þou schuldest wite wheþer þis werk were plesyng to 25 God or not; or, ȝif it be plesaunt, how þat it may be þat it is so plesaunt as I sey þat it is. To þis I answere & sey þat þis uestyon is moued of a corious witte, þe whiche wil on no wise late þee consent to þis werk er þe tyme be þat þer be maad aseep to þe coriouste þerof by sum feire skile.

30 & herfore schal I not lette; bot I schal in party make me liche to þee, fauoring þi proude witte, þat þou be aftirward liche vnto

3 þe] a Kk Har²; om. Pa 4 wittys] ben (can.) add. Har⁴
 5 strengþing] steryng Pa 6 wittys] & add. Pa 10 nakid] om.
 Pa 11 euer] ay Kk Har² 1 ofte] tr. Kk 12 clad] clothyd Pa
 qualite] of þi beyng (can.) add. Kk 14 of man . . . beyng] om.
 Pa 16 a] can. Pa 17 to] om. Kk Har² 20 woste] wottest Pa
 neuer] not Pa 20 þei] their worke Pa 21 in] the add. Pa
 24 were] so add. Har² 25 (not) or] & add. Pa 26 þat] om. Pa 27 on] in Pa 28 er] or
 is] om. Har² 26 þat] om. Kk Har² 27 on] in Pa 28 er] or
 Kk Har²; before Pa 30 her-] ther- Pa 31 -ward] om. Pa

me, folowing my conseil wiþ-outyn setting of merkes in þi meeknes. For, as witnessiþ Seinte Bernard:

Parfite meeknes settiþ no merkes. þan settist þou merkes in þi meeknes whan þou wilt not fulfille þe counsel of þi souereyn goostly, bot ȝif þi witte se þat it be to do. Lo! here maist þou see 5 þat I coueite souereinte of þee. & trewly so I do, & I wol haue it. I trowe loue steriþ me þerto more þen any abilnes þat I fele in myself in any heiȝt of kunning, or ȝit of worching, or degree of my leuyng. God amende þat is amys, for he wote fully, & I bot in party!

10

Bot now (for to make aseep to þi proude witte) in comendyng of þis werk, trewly I telle þee þat ȝif a soule, þat is þus occupied, had tongue & langage to sey as it felij, þan alle þe clerkes of Cristendome schuld wondre on þat wisdam. ȝe! & in comparison of it, al here grete clergie schuld seme | apeerte folij. & þerfore 15 f. 101b no wondre þof I kan not telle þee þe worþines of þis werk wiþ my boystouse beestly tongue. & God forbede þat it scholde be so defoulid in it-self for to be streynid vnder þe steringes of a fleschly tongue! Nay, it may not be, & certes it wil not be, & God forbede þat I schuld coueyte it! For al þat is spokyn of it is not it, bot of it. 20 Bot now, siþen we mowe not speke it, lat us speke of it, in confusion of proude wittys, & namely of þine, þe whiche is only, occasionly at þe leest, þe cause of þis writyng at þis tyme.

At þe first, I aske of þee what is perfecion of mans soule & whiche ben þe propirtees þat fallyn to þis perfecion. I 25 answer in þi persone, & I sey þat perfecion of mans soule is not elles bot an oneheed maad bitwix God & it in parfite charitee. þis perfecion is so heiȝ & so pure in it-self, abouen þe vnderstandingyng of man, þat it may not be knownen ne perceyuid in it-self. Bot þere

2 witnessiþ] om. Pa. Bernard] saith add. Pa. 5 do] be don Pa. A long interpolation on Meekness is added in Har². A marginal note reads: In veteri libro huius domus videlicet montis gracie De quattuor gradibus humilitatis nulla fit mentio 7 any] om. Har² 8 my] any Har²; om. Pa. 11 witte] & curiouse question before add. Har² 14 on] of Kk Har² Pa. 3e] 3a Kk Har² 18 to] it add. Kk 19 certes] truly Pa. forbede] forbydde Pa. 21 now] om. Pa. siþen] sen Har² speke] of add. Pa. 21-2 lat . . . þine] om. Pa. 22 þe] om. Pa. 23 occasionly] occasionally Pa. 26 I] om. Pa. not] nothyng Pa. 27 an] ooned (can.) add. Kk bitwix] betwixt Pa. 28 perfecion] onehede Pa.

where þe propirtees þat fallen to þis perfeccion ben verely seen & perceyuid, þere it is liche þat þe substaunce is abounding. & forþi it is to wite here wheche ben þe propirtees þat fallyn to perfeccion, in declaryng of þe nobilte of þis goostly excersise before alle oþer.

5 þe propirtees þat fallyn to perfeccion, þe which iche parfyte soule falleþ to haue, ben vertewes. & þan, ȝif þou wilt verrely beholde to þis werk in þi soule & to þe propertee & þe condicion of iche vertewe diuersely, þou schalt fynde þat alle vertewes ben cleerly & parfitely comprehendid in it, wiþ-outyn any crokyng or 10 corucion of þe entent.

I touche no vertewe here in specyal, for it nedip not; þou hast hem touchid in maner in oþer diuerse places of myn owne writyng.

For þis same werk, ȝif it be verrely conceyuid, is þat reuerent f. 102a affeccion & þe frute | departid fro þe tre þat I speke of in þi 15 lityl pistle of preier. Þis is þe cloude of vnknowyng; þis is þat priue loue put in purete of spirit; þis is þe Arke of þe Testament. Þis is Denis deuinite, his wisdom & his drewry, his liȝty derknes & his vnknowyn kunninges. Þis is it þat settip þee in silence as wele fro þouȝtes as fro wordes. Þis makiþ þi preier ful schorte. In 20 þis þou arte lernid to forsake þe woreld & to dispise it.

& þat more is, in þis þou arte lernid to forsake & dispise þin owne self, after þe teching of Crist in þe gospel, seiing þus: Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum; tollat crucem suam et sequatur me. Þat is: 'Who-so wole come after me, late hym forsake hym-self, late hym bere his cros & folow me.' As if he seide þus to þin vnderstanding accordyng to oure mater: 'Who-so wil come meekly, not wiþ me bot after me, to þe blis of heuen or to þe mounte of perfeccion.' For Criste ȝede before bi kynde, & we comyn after bi grace. His kynde is more worþi þen grace, &

1 þat] ins. in right margin Har¹ ben] merueylye (can.) add. Kk
 2 it] likes (can.) add. Kk forþi] therfore Pa 4 nobilte] noblenes Pa
 5 iche] euery Pa 6 falleþ] behouyth Pa 7 (&) þe] om. Pa 8 iche] euery Pa 10 corucion] corruptyng Pa 11 vertewe] nowe add.
 Har² 12 touchid] here (can.) add. Har¹ 14 þat] þt at Har² speke] spake Har² Pa þi] þis Kk; the Pa 15 þat] the Pa 16 þe] olde add. Har² 17 deuinite] dyuersitee Pa liȝty] lyȝtly Kk Pa derknes] myrknesse Kk Har² Pa 22 þus] om. Kk Pa. The reference Luke ix is given in the left margin of Har¹ 23 venire] om. Har² me] venire add. Har² -ipsum] et add. Har² Pa 24 þat] þis Har² 24-5 þat ... folow me] om. Pa is] þus to say add. Har² 24-5 late . . . self] ins. at foot of column in Har¹ 28 ȝede] wente Pa

grace is more worþi þen oure kynde. & in þis he lateþ us wetyn fully þat we mowen on no wise folow hym to þe mounte of *perfeccion*, as it falliþ to be in þe vse of þis werk, bot ȝif it be only sterid & led by grace.

& þat is ful soþe. For wite þou riȝt wel, & alle liche vnto þee þat 5 þis writyng scholen ouþer rede or here, þat þof al I bid þee þus pleynly & þus booldly set þee to þis werk, neuerþeles ȝit I fele verely, wiþ-outyn errorr or doute, þat Almiȝty God wiþ his grace behoueþ algates be þe cheef sterer & worcher, ouþer wiþ mene or wiþ-outyn; & þou only, or eny oþer liche vnto þee, bot þe consenter & 10 suffrer: sauyng þat þis consent & þis suffring schal be, in þe tyme of þis werk, actuely disposid & ablid to þis werk in purete of spirit, & semely borne up to þi Souereyn, | as þou mayst be lernid f. 102b by þe proef in þe goostly siȝt of þi spirit.

& siþ so is þat God of his goodnes steriþ & touchiþ diuerse 15 soulis diuersely, as it is som wiþ mene & som wiþ-outyn, who dar þan seie þat God stereþ not þee in þis writyng, or eny oþer liche vnto þee þat þis schal ouþer rede or here, only by me mene, þof I be vnworþi, sauyng his worschipful wille, þat hym likiþ to do as hym likiþ? I suppose it schal be þus: þe werk schal witnes whan 20 þe proef worchiþ. & þerfore, I preie þee, dispose þee for to receyue þis grace of þi Lorde, & here what he seiþ. 'Who-so wil come after me' (in þe maner before seide) 'late hym forsake hym-self.' I prey þee, how may a man more forsake him-self & þe woreld, & more dispise him-self & þe woreld, þen for to dedein for to þink of eny 25 qualite of here beinges?

For wite þou wel for certeyn þat, þof al I bid þee forgete alle þinges bot þe blynde felyng of þi nakid beyng, ȝit neuerþeles my wille is, & þat was myn entent in þe beginning, þat þou schuldest

2 mowen] not add. Pa 5 þat] this Pa & also add. Har²
 6 ouþer] om. Pa al] om. Pa 9 algates] to add. Pa ouþer] other,
 altered to either Pa 10 liche] to þe (can.) add. Kk vnto] to Pa
 &] þe add. Kk Har² 11 consent] consenting Pa 12 ablid] able Pa
 15 siþ sen Har² so is] om. Pa 16 it is] om. Pa 18 vnto] to
 Pa þis] it Kk Har²; om. Pa here] yt add. Pa 20 schal] om. Kk Har² Pa
 21 for] om. Pa receyue] þe (can.) add. Har¹ 22 þi] þis, s can. Har²
 23 before] afore Pa -self] & the worlde & add. Har², marginal note *Vetus*
 liber non 23-4 I prey . . . self] om. Kk 24-5 & more . . . woreld]
 om. Pa 25 þen] þat Kk 26 qualite] qualytees Pa 27 wite]
 knowe Pa wel] om. Kk Har² Pa al] om. Pa 28 bot] saue Pa
 29 in] at Pa schuldest] om. Kk Har² Pa

forȝete þe felyng of þe beyng of þi-self as for þe felyng of þe beyng of God. & for þis skyle I proudi ȝee in þe bigynnyng þat God is þi beyng. Bot for me ȝouȝt þou were not ȝit abil sodenly to be liftid up to þe goostly felyng of þe being of God for rudenes in 5 þi goostly felyng, þerfore, to late ȝee climbe ȝerto by degree, I bad ȝee first gnawe on þe nakid blinde felyng of þin owne being, vnto þe tyme þat þou miȝtest be maad able to þe hiȝe felyng of God bi goostly contynowance of þis priue werk. For þin entent & þi desire schal be euer to fele God in þis worching. For ȝof al I bid ȝee 10 in þe biginnynge, bicause of þi boistouste & þi goostly rudenes, f. 103a lappe & cloþe þe felyng of þi God | in þe felyng of þi-self, ȝit schalt ȝou after whan ȝou arte maad by contynowance more sleiȝ in 15 clennes of spirit, nakyn, spoyle & vtterly vncloþe þi-self of al maner of felyng of þi-self, þat ȝou be able to be cloþid wiþ þe gracyous felyng of God self.

& þis is þe trewe condicione of a parfite louer, only & vtterly to spoyle hym-self of him-self for þat þing þat he louiȝ, & not admit ne suffre to be cloþed bot only in þat þing þat he louiȝ; & þat not only for a tyme, bot eendlesly to be vmbilappid þerin, in 20 ful & fynal forȝetyng of hym-self. Þis is þe werk of loue þat none may knowe bot he þat feliȝ it. Þis is þe lesson of oure Lorde whan he seiȝ: 'Who-so wil loue me, late hym forsake him-self'; as who seiȝ: 'Late him spoyle hym-self of him-self ȝif he wil be verely cloþid in me, þat am þe side garnement of loue & of lastyng þat 25 neuer schal haue eende.'

& þerfore, euer whan ȝou beholdest to þi worchyng, & seest & felest þat it is þi-self þat ȝou felest & not God, ȝen schalt ȝou make sorow ernestly, & hertely longe after þe felyng of God, euirmore desiryng wiþ-outyn cesyng to forgo þe woful wetyng & þe foule

1 of þe] & Pa 2 þee] ins. Pa 3 for] bycawse Pa me] I Pa
were] was Kk Har² 5 bad] did bydde Pa 6 blinde] om. Pa
8 priue] gostly add. Har² þin] owne add. Har¹ (can. Har¹) Kk Har²
Pa 9 euer] ay Kk Har² al] om. Pa 10 boistouste] boystousnes
Pa rudenes] to add. Pa 11 of . . . felyng] om. Kk 13 nakyn]
nake Pa spoyle] spole Kk 15 God] hym add. Pa 17 spoyle] spole
Kk not] to add. Har² 18 admit . . . suffre] tr. Har² 19 vmbi-
lappid] vnlappyd, vn can. Pa 21-2 whan he seiȝ] saying Pa 23 spoyle]
spole Kk Har² 24 garnement] garment Kk Har² Pa 25 neuer schal]
tr. Pa 28 -more] om. Pa 29 cesyng] for (probably erased in Har¹)
add. Kk Har² wetyng . . . foule] weetyng & fowle ins. in margin Pa

felyng of þi blynde beyng; & coueite to fle fro þi-self as from venym. & þan forsakyst þou þi-self & dispisest þee ful felly, as þi Lorde biddeþ þee. & þan, whan þou coueitest so streitly, not for to vnbe—for þat were woodnes & dispise vnto God—bot to forgo þe wetyng & þe felyng of þi beyng (þe whiche behouïþ 5 algates be, ȝif Goddes loue schal parfitely be felt as it may be here) & seest & felest þat on no wise þou maist come to þi purpose, for þer wil algates folow & go wiþ þi doyng a nakid felyng of þi blynde beyng, be þou neuer so besy (bot ȝif it be any seeldom schort tyme whan God wol late þee fele hym-self in habundaunce | of loue) þe 10 f. 103b
 whiche nakyd felyng of þi blynde beyng wol euyrmore prees abouen þee, bitwix þee & þi God, as wolen in þi begynnnyng þe qualitees of þi beyng bitwix þee & þi-self: þan wol þee þenk it a wel heuy & a ful peynful birþen of þi-self. ȝe! Jhesu help þee þanne, for þan hast þou nede. For alle þe woo þat may be wiþ-outyn þat is 15 not a poynte to þat. For þan arte þi-self a cros to þi-self. & þis is trewe worching & wey to oure Lorde, as him-self seiþ: 'Late hym bere his cros,' first in þe peynfulnes of hym-self, & siþ 'folow me' into blis or into þe mounte of perfeccion, taastyng þe softenes of my loue in godly felyng of my-self. Lo! here mayst þou see þat 20 þee behouïþ soroufuly desire to forgo þe felyng of þi-self, & peynfuly bere þe birþin of þi-self as a cros, er þou maist be onyd to God in goostly felyng of him-self, þe whiche is parfite charite.

& here mayst þou se sumwhat & in partie fele, al after þat þou arte touchid & goostly merkid wiþ þis grace, þe worþines of þis 25 werk before alle oþer.

&, I preie þee, how schuldest þou com to þis worching by þe vse

1 fle] flye Pa fro] from Pa -self] & (can.) add. Har¹ from] fro Kk Har² Pa 2 þee] þi self Har² Pa ful] om. Pa 4 for] om. Pa vnto] to Pa bot] for (probably erased Har¹) add. Kk Har² to] be (can.) add. Kk 6 algates] nedys to Pa parfitely be] tr. Har² Pa 7 on] yn Pa 8 folow] the add. Pa a] & Pa 9 seeldom] om. Har²; tyme (can.) add. Kk tyme] & seldome add. Har² 10 þe] om. Pa 11 prees] apone þe add. Har² 12 bitwix] betwyxt Pa wolen] wele Kk þi] the Pa þe] thy Pa 13 bitwix] betwixt Pa þee] thow Pa a] om. Kk Har² Pa 14 wel] fulle Kk Har² Pa heuy] haue Kk birþen] beryng Pa 16 arte] is Kk Har² Pa &] om. Pa 17 &] the add. Pa 18 peyn-] pyne- Kk siþ] syen Har²; then Pa 19 (or) into] to the Pa 21 desire] for (probably erased Har¹) add. Kk Har² 21-2 & peynfuly . . . self] om. Pa 22 er] or Har²; before Pa 24 þou] om. Kk se] om. Pa -what] see (ins.) add. Pa.

of þi wittys? Sekirly neuer; ne ȝit by þi faire wise, þi sotyle & þi queinte ymaginecions & meditacions, ȝe, þof þei be of þi wrechid leuyng, þe Passion of Criste, þe ioies of oure Lady, or of alle þe seintes & aungelles of heuen, or ȝit of eny qualite or sotilte 5 or condicion þat perteyniþ to þe beyng of þi-self or of God. Sekirly me had leuer haue soche a nakid blynde felyng of my-self as I touchid before (not of my doynges bot of my-self. Many men clepen here doynges hem-self, & it is not so; for one am I þat do, & anoþer aren my dedes þat ben done. & þe same it is of 10 God; for one is he in him-self, & anoþer ben his werkes). & rþer f. 104a it schuld breke myn herte in teres for lackyng | of felyng of God & for þe peinful birþin of my-self, & kyndil my desire in loue & desiryng after þe felyng of God, þan alle þe sotyle & þe queynte ymaginecions or meditacions þat man kan telle or may fynde 15 wretyn in book, be þei neuer so holy ne schewe þei neuer so feire to þe sotyle iȝe of þi corious witte.

Neuerþeles ȝit ben þees faire meditacions þe trewest wey þat a synner may haue in his begynnyng to þe goostly felyng of him-self & of God. & me wolde þenk þat it were impossible to mans 20 vnderstanding—þof al God may do what he wil—þat a synner schuld com to be restful in þe goostly felyng of him-self & of God, bot ȝif he first sawe & felt by ymagination & meditacion þe bodily doynges of hym-self & of God, & þerto sorowed for þat þat were to sorowen, & maad joie for þat þat were to joien. & 25 who-so comeþ not in bi þis weye, he comeþ not trewly; & þerfore he mote stonde þeroute, & doþ so whan he weneþ þat he is best þer-in. For many weneþ þat þei ben wiþ-inne þe goostly dore, &

1 Sekirly] Surely Pa ȝi] the Har² ȝi] om. Pa 2 ȝi] the (ins. & can.) Pa &] or can., & ins. Pa þof] if Kk Har² Pa ȝei] yt Pa of] om. Pa 3 Lady] sancte Marie add. Har² or of] om. Pa 4 þe] om. Pa seintes] sanctes Har² of] in Har² ȝit of] om. Pa or] the add. Pa 6 Sekirly] Truly Pa me] I Pa nakid] om. Pa 9 do] doþe Kk Har² it] ins. Pa 10 ben] are Pa rþer] in ther Har² 11 lackyng] wantyng Kk Har² Pa of] þe add. Har² 12 pein-] pyne- Kk 13 sotyle] soteltees (ees erased Kk) Kk Har² þe] om. Pa 15 book] bookes Pa ne] or Pa 16 ȝi] the (ins.) Pa 17 þe] þei Kk 19 me] more Pa to] a add. Har² 20 al] om. Pa 22 meditacion] of add. Pa 24 sorowen] sorowe Kk Har² Pa ioien] ioye Kk Har² Pa &] But Pa 25 so] that add. Pa 26 mote] moue Har²; must Pa þer-] with- Pa weneþ] best add. Har² Pa 26-7 þat ... weneþ] om. Kk 26 best] om. Har² Pa

ȝit stonden þei þer-oute, & scholen do vnto þe tyme þat þey sechen meekly þe dore. & somme þer ben þat fynden þe dore sone, & comen inne raper þen somme; & þat is longe on þe porter pleynly, wiþ-outyn prees or deseert of hem-self.

It is a merueilous houshalde, goostlines, for whi þe Lorde is not 5 only portour hym-self, bot also he is þe dore: þe porter he is bi his Godheed, & þe dore he is by his manheed. þus seiþ hym-self in þe gospel:

Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, saluabitur; et siue egredietur siue ingredietur, pascua inueniet. Qui vero non intrat 10 per ostium sed assedit aliunde, ipse fur est et latro. Þat is to þin vnderstanding as ȝif he seide þus acordyng to oure mater: 'I þat am almiȝty by my Godheed & may leuefuly as porter late | in f. 104b whom I wol, & bi what wey þat I wol, ȝit, for I wol þat þer be a comoun pleyne wey & an open entre to alle þat wolen come, so 15 þat none be excusid by vnknowyng of þe wey, I haue cloþid me in þe comoun kynde of man, & maad me so opyn þat I am þe dore by my manheed, & who-so entreþ by me, he schal be saaf.'

þei entren by þe dore, þat in beholdingyng of þe Passion of Criste sorowen here wickydnes, þe whiche ben cause of þat Passion, wiþ 20 bitter reprouyng of hem-self, þat deseruid & not suffrid, & pite & compassion of þat worþi Lorde, þat so vili suffrid & noþing deseruid; & siþen lifte up here hertes to þe loue & þe goodnes of his Godheed, in þe whiche he voucheþ-saaf to meke hym so lowe in oure deedly manheed. Alle þees entren bi þe dore, & þei scholen 25 be saaf. & wheþer þei gone inne, in þe beholdingyng of þe loue & þe goodnes of his Godheed, or oute, in beholdingyng of þe peyne of his

1 þer-] with- Pa 2 þer] om. Kk; ins. Pa 3 raper] soner Pa
on] of Kk Har² Pa 4 prees] ȝe] ins. in margin in pencil Har² 4 prees]
pryce Pa hem-] hym- Pa 5 þe] our Pa is] nys Kk 6 only]
the add. Pa hymself] om. Pa he is] om. Kk Har² Pa he is] om. Kk
Har² Pa 7 his] by (can.) add. Har¹ &] om. Kk Har² Pa he is] om.
Kk Har² Pa -heed] -hode Kk 10 egredietur. . . ingredietur] tr. Pa
11 ipse] ille Pa Pat] þis Har² 13 leue-] law- Pa as] a add.
Kk Har² Pa 14 & bi . . . wol] om. Kk Har² Pa for] bycawse Pa
a] ins. Pa 18 -heed] -hode Har² he] om. Har² 19 in] the add. Pa
20 sorowen . . . Passion] om. Pa wickydnes] wricchednesse Kk Har²
21 bitter] teerys yn the (can.) add. Pa (suffrid) &] haue add. Har²
23 siþen] then Pa 24 voucheþ] woched Kk, wouchede Har², vowchyd Pa
25 -heed] -hode Har² þei] om. Har² Pa 26 wheþer] þat add. Har²
loue & þe] om. Pa 27 or] goo (ins.) add. Pa peyne] paynes, scan. Pa

manheed, þei scholen fynde goostly fode of deuocion inowȝ, soffisaunt & aboundyng to þe helþe & sauynge of here soules, þof al þei comen neuer ferþer inwardes in þis liif.

& who-so entreþ not by þis dore, bot clymbeþ oþer-wise to 5 perfeccion by þe sotil seching & þe corious fantastic worchyng in his wilde wantoun wittis, leuyng þis comoun pleyn entre touchid before & þe trewe counsel of goostly faders: he, þat whatso-euer he be, is not only a niȝt þeef bot a day skulker. A niȝt þeef he is, for he goþ in þe derknes of synne, more lenyng in his 10 presumpcion to þe syngulerete of his owne witte & his wille þen to any trewe counsel or to þis comon pleyn wey touchid before. A day skulker he is, for, vnder colour of clere goostly leuyng, priuely he pikiþ þe outward signes & wordes of contemplacion & haþ not þe frute. & þus for he felip in him sumtyme a [liking] f. 105a 15 longing, so lityl as it is, to | come nere God, þerfore, bleendif vnder colour of þis, he wenip al be good inowȝ þat he doþ, whan it is þe perilousest purpose þat may be, a ȝong man to folow þe feersnes of his desire vnrewlid bi counsel; & namely whan it is singularly set to climben in hiȝe þinges, not only abouen him- 20 self bot abouen þe comoun plein wey of Cristen men touchid before, þe whiche I clepe, by þe teching of Criste, þe dore of deuocion & þe trewest entre of contemplacion þat may be in þis liif.

Bot now forþe of oure mater þat specialy in þis writyng 25 perteyneþ vnto þee, & to alle oþer liche vnto þee in þat dis- posicion only. What þerof ȝif þis be þe dore, schal a man þan whan he haþ þe dore euer stonde þerate or þerinne & com none

1 -heed] -hode Har² 2 helþe] hele Kk Har² Pa &] þe add. Har² al] om. Pa 3 ferþer] ferer Har² inwardes] om. Pa 4 &] Ryght soo on contrarye wyse Pa who-so] he that Pa 5 þe] om. Pa sotil] curyous Pa 6 comoun] ins. Pa 7 þat] om. Pa 8 bot] also (ins.) add. Pa 9 in (his)] to Pa 10 presumpcion] & add. Pa & his wille] om. Pa 14 felip] syndeth Pa him] selff add. Pa liking] Har¹ has the unique inferior reading litil. See note 15 lityl] sotyl Kk Har² Pa bleendif] blynded Kk Har² Pa 17 perilousest] periouste, perylouest written above Har²; moost perylous Pa; way or add. Har² 18 feersnes] feernes Kk namely] specially Pa 19 in] on Pa 21 by] om. Pa 22 of] to Har² 24 of] yn Pa writyng] ins. Pa 25 liche] to þe (can.) add. Kk 26 man] þerfore add. Har² þan] om. Pa 27 euer] om. Kk Har² Pa stonde] euer add. Kk Har² Pa none] neuer Pa

innermore? I answere for þee, & I sey þat it is good þat he so do euer, til þe grete rust of his boistous bodelynes be in grete party rubbid awei, his counsel & his conscience to witnes; & namely, euer to he be clepid innermore bi þe priue teching of þe spirit of God, þe whiche techyng is þe rediest & þe sekerist witnes þat may 5 be had in þis liif of þe clepyng & þe drawyng of a soule innermore to more special worching of grace.

Euydence of þis touching a man may haue þus: ȝif he fele in his contynoweel excersise as it were a soft growyng desire to come nere God in þis liif, as it may be by a specyal goostly felyng, as he 10 heriþ men speke of, or elles fyndeþ wretyn in bokes. For he þat felip hym not sterid in heryng & redyng of goostly worching, & namely in his iche dayes excersise by a growing desire to come nere God, lat hym stonde ȝit styll at þe dore, as a man clepid to saluacion bot not ȝit to perfeccion. 15

& of o þing I warne þee. What-so-euer þou be þat þis writyng schalt ouþer rede or here, & namely in þis place where I make a difference bitwix hem þat ben clepid to saluacion & hem þat ben clepid to perfeccion, | þat of wheþer partie þat þou fele is ȝi f. 105b clepyng, loke neijer þat þou deme ne discusse in þe dedes of God 20 ne of man, ferþer þen only ȝi-self—as whom he steriþ & clepiþ to perfeccion & whom he clepiþ not; or of þe schortnes of tyme, whi he clepiþ hym raper þen hym. ȝif þou wilt not erre, loke not þat þou deme; bot onys here & vnderstonde. ȝif þou be clepid, ȝeue preisyng to God, & prey þat þou falle not. & ȝif þou be not ȝit 25 clepid, prey meekly to God þat he clepe þee whan his wille is. Bot teche him not what he schal do. Late hym alone. He is

1 (&) I] om. Pa it] om. Har² / so do] tr. Pa 2 euer] ay Kk Har²; om. Pa til] to Kk Har²; vntyll Pa his] boistousnesse (can.) add. Kk 4 to] tyll Pa 5 rediest] surest Pa sekerist] redyest Pa 6 (&) þe] om. Pa 8 þis] hys Pa 12 felip] not add. Pa hym] selff (can.) add. Pa not] om. Pa sterid] ins. Pa &] can., or ins. Pa 13 dayes] day Har² 16 þat] ouþer add. Kk Har² þis] boke (can.) add. Kk 17 ouþer] om. Kk Har² 18 bitwix] betwixt Pa 19 partie] parte Pa þat] om. Pa 20 loke] thow add. Pa neijer] neuer Kk; nother Pa þat þou] om. Pa in] ins. Pa 21 þen] þat Kk self] & (can.) add. Kk clepiþ] calleþ Kk Har² 22 he clepiþ] om. Pa clepiþ] calleþ Har² þe] om. Pa whi] þat add. Har² 23 (loke) not] om. Pa 24 deme] not add. Pa 25 preisyng] prayse Pa to] vnto Kk Har²; almyghty add. Pa prey] hym add. Har² ȝit] om. Har²; ins. Pa 26 clepid] ȝit add. Har² to God] ins. Pa

miȝty, witty & willy inowȝ to do þe best for þee & alle þat hym loueþ.

Haue pees wiþ þi parte. Wheþer þat þou haue, þee nedeþ not to pleyne þee; for þei ben boþe precious. Þe first is good & algates 5 nedeþ to be had. Þe secound is betir, gete who-so gete may; or (ȝif I soþelier schal sey) who-so bi grace is getyn & clepid þerto of oure Lorde.

Proudly mowe we prees & snapir at þe eende; bot certes wiþ-outyn him it is nouȝt þat we do, hym-self seiing: Sine me nichil 10 potestis facere. þat is to þin vnderstanding: 'With-outyn me first steryng & principaly mouyng, & þe only bot consentyng & suffryng, þe mowen nowȝt do þing þat is parfiteli plesyng to me', as schuld be in maner þe werk of þis writyng.

& alle þis I sey in confusion of here erryng *presumpcion* þat, 15 in þe coryouste of here clergie or here kyndely witte, wolen algates be principal worchers hem-self, God bot suffryng or only consentyng, whan verrely þe contrary is soþ in þinges contemplatyue. For only in hem ben alle corious skyles of clergie or of kyndely kunningng fer put bak, þat God be þe principal. Neuer- f. 106a 20 þeles, in þinges leueful & actyue, þi mans clergye & his kyndely kunningng schal worche with God by & by, only by his consent in spirit prouid by þees þre witnes: Scripture, conseil & comoun custum of kynde & degré, eelde & compleccyon; in so moche þat man schal not folow þe steryng of þe spirit, seme it neuir so liking 25 ne so holy; I mene in þinges actyue—bot ȝif it falle vnder his clergial or his kyndely kunningng, þof al it be neuir so strongly stuffid by alle or by eny of þees þre witnes touchid before. & verrely it is

1 inowȝ] ins. Pa &] for add. Har² alle] them add. Pa 3 parte] partye Kk Har² 5 gete] yt add. Pa -so gete] ins. Pa 6 getyn] gotten Pa 7 of] by Pa 8 mowe] om. Pa we] may add. Pa snapir] swaper Har² certes] truly Pa 9 seiing] þus add. Har² 10 to þin vnderstanding] om. Pa 12 ȝe] he Har² nowȝt] om. Pa þing] nothyng Pa 13 writyng] wytyngr Kk 14 &] om. Pa erryng presumpcion] tr. Har² 17 contrary is soþ] ins., thynges are contrary can. Pa 18 ben] are Pa 19 bak] abacke Pa þat... principal (werker add.)] ins. Pa be] euer add. Har² 20 leue-] law- Pa actyue] actyfes Kk Har² his] ins. Pa 22 witnes] þat is add. Har² &] om. Pa 23 &] om. Kk Har² Pa eelde] age written above Pa þat] a add. Har² 25 it] be (can.) add. Har¹ clergial] clergye Pa 26 al] om. Pa 27 by] ins. Pa it] om. Kk Har²; this Pa is] þis add. Kk Har²; a add. Pa

grete skile þat man be more þen his werkes. & for þis it is þat by þe statute & þe ordinaunce of Holy Chirche, þer schal no man be admittyd to prelacye, þe whiche is þe heiest degré in actyue leuyng, bot ȝif þe office of þat cure wol falle vnder his kunning by testymony of trewe examynacion. So þat, in þinges actyue, mans 5 clergie & his kyndely kunning schal principally abounde as in worching, God gracyously consentyng, wiþ þees þre witnes aprouid. & skilfuly, for alle þinges actyue ben beneþe & vnder þe wisdom of man. Bot in þinges contemplatyue þe heiȝest wisdom þat may be in man [as man] is fer put vnder, þat God be 10 þe principal in worching, & man bot only consenter & suffrer.

& þus I vnderstonde þis worde of þe gospel: Sine me nichil potestis facere—þat is: ‘Wiþ-outyn me ȝe mowe do noþing’—on o maner in actyues & on anoþer in contemplatyues. In actyues be-houeþ hym be, ouþer wiþ suffring or wiþ consent or elles wiþ 15 boþe, ȝif ouȝt schal be done, wheþer it be leueful & plesaunt to hym or not: in contemplatyues, by þrincipal worching, askyng of hem nouȝt elles bot only suffraunce & here consent. So þat generaly to vnderstonde: in alle oure doynges, leueful & vnleueful, actyue or contemplatyue, | wiþ-outyn hym we mowe do noþing. 20 f. 106b He is wiþ us in synne only bi suffraunce & not by consent, to oure fynal damnacion bot ȝif we meekly amende us. In dedes þat ben actyue & leueful, he is wiþ us boþe by suffring & consent, to oure reproef ȝif we go bak & oure grete mede ȝif we do forþ. In dedes þat ben contemplatyue he is wiþ us, þrincipaly steryng & 25 worching, & we only bot suffring & consenting, to oure grete perfeccion & goostly onyng of oure soule vnto hym in parfite charite. & þus siþ alle þe men of þis liif mowen be deuided in þre,

2 þe] om. Pa þe] om. Pa schal] be add. Pa be] om. Pa 4 bot] if (can.) add. Kk 4-5 testymony] wytnes Har² 5 in] this actyue add. Pa þinges] thyng Pa actyue] om. Pa 6 &] & add. Har¹ 8 ben] is Kk Har² 10 as man] om. Har¹, but in all the other MSS. 12 þis] the Pa 14 o] a Kk on] om. Kk; yn can., on ins. Pa anoþer] manere add. Har² actyues] hym add. Pa 15 hym] to Pa ouþer] eyther Pa wiþ] ins. Pa consent] consentenge, nge can. Har² 16 wheþer] þat add. Har² leue-] law- Pa &] or Pa plesaunt] plessyng Har² 18 suffraunce] sufferyng Pa 19 leue-] law- Pa -leue-] -law- Pa 20 or] & Pa 21 us] o (can.) add. Har¹ 22 ȝif] ins. Pa 23 leue-] law- Pa suffring] sufferance Pa 24 &] to add. Pa do] goo Pa 26 suffring &] om. Pa 27 vnto] to Pa 28 þus] om. Har² siþ] sen Har²; ins. Pa þe] ins. Pa of] yn Pa mowen] þus add. Har²

in synners, in actyues & in *contemplatyues*, þerfore generally, accordyng to alle þis woreld, þis worde of oure Lorde may be seide vnto alle: 'Wiþ-outyn me' only suffryng & not consentyng as in synners, or elles boþe suffryng & consentyng as in actyues, or, 5 þat more þan alle þis is, principally steryng & worching as in *contemplatyues*, 'þe mowen do noþing.'

Lo! here many wordes & lityl sentence. Neuerþeles, alle þis haue I seide to late þee wite in whiche þinges þou schalt vse þe werk of þi wittes, & in whiche nouȝt; & how þat God is wiþ þee 10 in o werk & how in anoþer. & ȝit, parauenture, in þis knowing þow maist eschewe disceytes, in þe whiche þou miȝtest haue fallen ne had þis be schewid. & þerfore, siþ it is seide, late it be, þof al it be bot lityl perteynyng to oure mater. Bot now forþe of oure mater.

15 þou mayst aske me þis questyon: By what o tokyn or mo, ȝif þee liste telle me, may I rāpest wite wiþ-outyn errorr wheþer þis growyng desire þat I fele in myn iche dayes worching & þis f. 107a likyng steryng þat I haue in redyng & heryng of þis mater | be verrely a clepyng of God to a more specyal worching of grace, 20 as is þe mater of þis writyng; or it is a norisching & a fedyng of my spirit to abide styllle & to worche forþ in my comoun grace, þis þat þou clepest þe dore & þe comoun entre of alle Cristen men?

To þis I answer so febely as I kan. þou seest wel here þat I 25 sette þee here in þis writyng two kyndes of euidences, bi þe whiche þou schalt proue þi goostly clepyng of God as to þis werk, one wiþ-inne, anoþer wiþ-owten. Of þe whiche two, neiper may suffise in þis caas fully, as me þenkeþ, wiþ-outyn þat oper. Bot

1 þer-] her-, t ins. initially Pa 3 vnto] to, vn- ins. Pa me] ouþer add. Kk Har² Pa only] yn (can.) add. Pa 4 elles] ins. Pa or] els add. Pa 7 here] be add. Pa 8 wite] knowe Pa 9 werk] workes Pa 12 ne] om. Pa had] not add. Pa 16 siþ] sen Har² 13 þof al] all (ins.) thowgh Pa bot] om. Kk Har² Pa 14 of] to Pa 15 mo] more Pa 16 liste] to add. Pa rāpest] soonest Pa wite] knowe Pa þis] þis add. Har¹ 17 iche dayes] dayly Pa 20 norisching] wyrchyng Kk Har² Pa 21 abide] byde Kk to] om. Pa 24 þis] wille add. Kk Har² I] wyll add. Pa so] the (ins.) Pa here] how (ins. and can.), here ins. Pa 25 here] om. Pa 26 þi] the Pa 27 -inne] & add. Har² Pa (ins. Pa) neiper] nouþer Kk Har² Pa 28 caas] by it one add. Har²

where þei boþe ben to-geders one & accordyng, þan is þin euidence ful inowȝ wiþ-outyn eny failing.

þe first of þees two euydence, þe whiche is wiþ-inne, is þis growyng desire þat þou felist in þin iche dayes worching. & of þis desire þou schalt wite þus moche: þat þof al þat þe desire be 5 a werk of þe soule blynde in it-self—for riȝt is þe desire of þe soule as gropyng & steppynge is of þe body; & boþe ben groping & steppynge blynde werkes of þe body, þou wost wel þi-self—bot þof þat þe werke of þis desire be neuer so blynde, ȝit neuerþeles þer comouneþ & folowiþ wiþ it a maner of goostly siȝt, þe whiche is 10 in partie cause & a mene forþering þis desire. Beholde þan besily to þin iche dayes excersise, what it is in it-self. & þan ȝif it be þe mynde of þi wreichidnes, þe Passyon of Criste, or eny soche þat longeþ to þe comoun entre of Cristen men touchid before, þan ȝif it so be þat þis goostly siȝt, þat þus comouneþ & foloweþ wiþ 15 þi blynde desire, rise fro þees comoun beholdynges, sekirly þan it is a tokyn to me þat þe growing of þis desire is bot a norisching & a fedyng of þi spirit to abide stille & to worche | forþ in þi f. 107b comoun grace, & no cleping ne stering of God to any more special grace.

20

Now, forþermore, þe toþer secounde euidence wiþ-outyn is a likyng stering þat þou felest in redyng or hering of þis mater. I clepe þis euidence *with-outen*, for it comiþ froo wiþ-outyn by þe windowes of þi bodily wittys, as by heryng & seing in þe tyme of þi redyng. Now touching þe secounde euidence, ȝif it so be þat þis 25 likyng stering, þat þou felist in hering & redyng of þis mater, laste

1 boþe ben] *tr.* Pa -geders] -gydre Kk Har²; togyther Pa acord-
yng] þin (*can.*) add. Kk 2 eny] *om.* Pa failing] falyng Kk;
fallynge Har² 3 þe] Pat Har² þees] þis Har² euydence]
euydences Kk Pa 4 iche dayes] dayly Pa 5 þof] of Kk
þof al] *tr.* Pa þat] *om.* Kk Har² Pa þe] *om.* Har² 6 þe] þi Har²
riȝt] *soo add.* Pa þe] *om.* Kk Har² Pa 7 ben] is Kk Har²; *om.*
Pa 8 steppynge] *be add.* Pa of] in Kk Pa wost] wote Kk Har²;
wotest Pa 9 þat] *om.* Pa ȝit] *om.* Pa 10 comouneþ] comeþ Har² Pa
& folowiþ] *ins.* Pa 11 a] *om.* Pa 12 iche dayes] dayly Pa 13 soche]
other add. Pa 14 longeþ] belongyth Pa 15 so be] *tr.* Pa comouneþ]
comeþ Har² Pa 16 fro] from Pa sekirly] truly Pa 18 abide]
byde Kk Har² þi] the Pa 21 toþer] other Pa 23 withouten ...
froo] *ins. at foot of column in Har¹* comiþ] sounþ in Kk Har²; semyth
(*can.*), commith yn written above Pa froo] from Pa 25 Now] as *add.*
Pa so be] *tr.* Pa

ne contynew no lenger with þee bot only þe tyme of þi reding or hering, bot it cesiþ þanne, or elles sone after, so þat þou neiper wakenest ne slepist þer-in ne þer-wiþ, & namely it foloweþ þee not in þi cotidiane excersise, as it were going & presing bitwix þee & it, stering & ledyng þi desire; þan it is a token verrey, in my conseit, þat þis likyng stering þat þou felist in hering & redyng of þis mater, is bot [a] kyndely gladnes þat iche Cristen soule haþ in hering or redyng of þe trewþe (& nameli of þat þe whiche touchiþ sotely & declareþ verely þe propirtees of perfecccion þat most ben according to þe soule of man, & namely of God) & no goostly touching of grace, ne cleping of God to any oþer more special worching of grace þen is þat þe whiche is þe dore & þe comoun entre to Cristen men.

Bot ȝif it so be þat þis likyng stering, þat þou felest in redyng & hering of þis mater, be so abounding in it-self þat it go wiþ þee to bedde, it riseþ wiþ þee at morow, it foloweþ þee forþ al þe day in al þat þou doste, it reuiþ þee fro þi cotidiane wonte excersise & goþ bitwix it & þee, it comouneþ & foloweþ þi desire, in so mochē þat þee þenk it al bot o desire or þou wost neuer what, it chaungeþ þi gesture & makeþ þi chere semely. Lastyng it, alle f. 108a þing eseþ þee & noþing may greue þee. A þousand mile | woldest þou renne to comoun mouþly wiþ one þat þou wist þat verrely felt it; & ȝit, whan þou comest þere, kanst þou nouȝt sey, speke who-so speke wil, for þee list not speke bot of it. Fewe ben þi wordes, bot ful of frute & of fir. A schorte worde of þi mouþ conteneþ a woreld ful of wisdom, ȝit semeþ it bot foly to hem þat

1 ne] or Pa lenger] langer Kk Har² þi] om. Pa 2 it] om. Kk Har² Pa neiper] nouþer Kk Har² 3 wakenest] slepyst Pa slepist] wakest Pa 4 cotidiane] dayly Pa bitwix] betwixt Pa 5 verrey] verly (ins.) Pa 6 stering] om. Har² in] theryn Pa 7 a] Har¹ has the unique inferior reading & iche] euery Pa Cristen] criste Kk soule] man Pa 8 or] & Pa (þat) þe] om. Pa 9 & or Pa most ben] tr. Pa 12 þe] om. Pa (is) þe] common add. Pa þe comoun] om. Pa 13 to] of Pa 14 it] om. Har² so be] tr. Pa 16 al] yn Pa 17 reuiþ] pluckyth Pa fro] from Pa cotidiane wonte] dayly Pa 18 bitwix] betwixt Pa it] þe Har² Pa þee] it Har² Pa comouneþ] comeþ Har² Pa 19 wost] wottest Pa neuer] not Pa 21 þing] thynges Pa 22 renne] ronne Pa mouþly] mouþly Kk; om. Pa one] mowthly add. Pa 23 kanst þou] tr. Har² Pa 24 -so speke] ins. Pa list] lust Pa bot] onely add. Har² 25 (&) of] om. Pa þi] moþe (can.) add. Kk

wonen in here wittis. þi silence is softe, þi speche ful speedful, þi preier is preue, þi pride ful pure, þi maners ben meek, þi mirþe ful mylde, þi list is likyng to pleye wiþ a childe. þou louest to be only & sit by þi-self; men wolden let þee, þee þenkiþ, bot ȝif þei wrouȝt wiþ þee. þee list not rede book ne here book, bot only of 5 it, so þat þin inwarde euidence & also þin vtter weren boþe accordyng & knittyng in one.

3e! & ȝif boþe [þ]ese euidence wiþ alle here fautours wretyn now here—fro þou haue ones had hem alle or eny of hem—sese for a tyme, & þou be lefte as þou were bareyn, þee þenkiþ, as wel 10 fro þe felyng of þis newe feruour as from þin olde wont werk, so þat þee þenkeþ þee fallen doun bitwix two, hauyng neuer neijer bot lacking hem boþe: ȝit be not ouer heuy for þis; bot suffre meekly & abide paciently þe wille of oure Lorde. For now arte þou in þe goostly see, to my lices, schipping ouer fro bodelines 15 into goostlines.

Many grete stormes & temptacions, parauenture, scholen rise in þis tyme, & þou wost neuer wheþer to renne for socour. Alle is awey fro þi feling, comoun grace & specyal. Be not ouer feerde, al-þof þou haue mater as þee þenkeþ; bot haue a loue- 20 trist in oure Lorde, so litil as þou maist gete for þe tyme, for he is not fer. He schal loke up, parauenture riȝt sone, & efte touche þee wiþ a more feruent stering of þat same grace þan euer þou feltest | any before. Þen arte þou al hole & alle good inowȝ, as f. 108b þee þenkeþ, last while it laste may. For sodenly, er euer þou wite, 25

1 wonen] dwell Pa 2 pure] pore Kk 3 list] lust Pa 4 &]
to add. Pa 5 not] to add. Pa
book] om. Pa 6 vtter] owtward Pa 7 acordyng] acordynde
Har² 8 ȝe] & add. Kk 9] om. Pa boþe] all Pa þese] yese
Har¹ 10 euidence] euydencys Pa 11 now] ins. Pa fro] from Pa
12 fro] from Pa from] fro Kk Har² 12 bitwix] betwixt Pa;
bothe add. Pa two] ins. Pa neuer] om. Kk Har² Pa neijer]
nowþer Kk Har²; of þaim add. Har² 13 lacking] wantyng Kk Har²
14 abide] byde Kk Har² 15 ouer] om. Pa fro] from Pa 16 into]
to Pa 17 wost] wottest Pa neuer] not Pa renne] rynne
Kk Har²; ronne Pa 19 fro] from Pa; þe in add. Har² ouer]
to much Pa 20 feerde] aferde Pa; þan add. Kk Har² Pa al-] om. Pa
mater] ins., cause (can.) Pa a] ins. Pa loue] louely Pa 21 trist]
trust Pa 22 riȝt] full Pa efte] ins. Pa 23 þat] the Pa;
ylke add. Har² 24 feltest] feled Kk Har² any] ins. Pa alle]
ys add. Pa 25 while] whyls Pa er] ar Kk euer] om. Pa
wite] be ware Pa

alle is awey, & þou leuyst bareyn in þe bote, blowyn with blundryng, now heder now þeder, þou wost neuir where ne wheder. 3it be not abascht, for he schal come, I behote þee, ful sonē, whan hym likiþ [to leþe þee] & douȝtely delyuer þee of alle þi dole, fer 5 more worþely þen he euer did before. 3e! & ȝif he [eft] go, eft wol he come aȝeyn; & iche tyme, ȝif þou wel bere þee by meek suffryng, wil he come more worþelyer & merilier þen oþer. & alle þis he doþ for he wil haue þee maad as pleying to his wille goostly as a roon gloue to þin honde bodely.

10 & siþ he sumtyme goþ & somtyme comeþ, þerfore doubli in þis double werk wol he priuely proue þee & worche þee to his owne werk. By þe wiþdrawyng of þi feruour, þe whiche þee þenkeþ his goyng, þof al it be not so, wole he propirly proue þi pacyence. For wite þou riȝt wel þat, þof God sumtyme wiþdrawe 15 þees sensible swetnes, þees feruent felynges & þees flaumyng desires, neuerþeles he wiþdraweþ neuer þeraþer his grace in his chosen. For sekirly I may not trowe þat his special grace may euer be wiþdrawen fro his chosen þat onys haue ben touchid þer-wiþ, bot ȝif synne deedly were in þe cause. Bot alle þees sensible swetnes, 20 þees feruent felynges & þees flawmyng desires, þe whiche in hemself ben not grace bot tokenes of grace, þees ben oft-tymes wiþdrawyn in prouyng of oure pacience, & oft-tymes for oure oþer many goostly profites, moo þan we wene. For grace in it-self is so heiȝ, so pure & so goostly, þat it may not be felt in

1 leuyst] left Har² Pa blowyn] blowyng Kk Har² Pa 1-2 blundryng] wynde add. Har² 2 wost] wote Kk Har²; wottest Pa neuir] not Pa where ne] ins. Pa 3 abascht] abayst Kk Har² behote] behete Har²; promyse Pa 4 to leþe þee] *The reading of all best MSS. except Har¹. See note; to ease the Pa þi] om. Kk dole] sorowe Pa 5 he euer] tr. Kk Har² Pa 3e] 3a Kk Har² eft] *The reading of all best MSS. except Har¹*; often Pa eft] often Pa 6 iche] euery Pa wel] wylle Kk Har² Pa; þat (can.) add. Har² 7 worþelyer] worthely Pa merilier] mery(lly ins.)er Pa 8 pleying] plying Kk Har²; playne can., plying ins. Pa 9 gloue] ys add. Pa 10 siþ] sen Har² 11 double] pryuy Pa priuely] om. Pa 12 þe] ins. Pa 12-13 þee þenkeþ] thow thynkest Pa 13 his goyng] is gone Har²; ys goyng Pa al] om. Pa 15 þees] þis Har² 17 sekirly] truly Pa his] this Pa euer] om. Pa be] ins. Har²; euer add. Pa 18 fro] from Pa þat] he add. Pa onys] om. Pa haue] haþ Kk Har² Pa; oons add. Pa ben] he Kk Har²; om. Pa 19 synne deedly] tr. Pa in] ins. Har² Pa 20 þees] ins. Pa þees] þis Har² 21 þees] om. Pa oft] often Har² Pa 22 oft-] often- Har² Pa 23 oþer] om. Pa moo] more Pa 24 heiȝ . . . pure] tr. Kk Har² Pa &] om. Pa*

oure sensible partye. þe tokenes þerof mowen, bot not it. & þus sumtyme oure Lorde wol wiþdrawe þi sensible feruours boþe in bygyng & prouyng of þi pacyence; & not only for þis skyle, | bot f. 109a for many oþer, þe whiche I set not here at þis tyme. Bot forþ of oure mater. 5

By þe worþines, þe oftnes & þe growyng of þees sensible felynges touchid before (þe whiche þee þenkiþ his comyng, þof al it be not so) he wol norische & fede þi spirit to last & to lyue in loue & worscheping of hym. So þat þus, bi paciens in absens of þees sensible felynges, þe tokenes of grace, & by þat liuely 10 norisching & þat louely fedyng of þi spirit in here presence, he wol make þee in boþe to-gedir so bliþely bowyng & so plesauntly pliing to þe perfeccion & þe goostly onheed to his owne wille (þe whiche onyng is parfite charite) þat þou schalt be as glad & as bliþe to forgo soche sensible felynges at his wille, as for to haue 15 hem & fele hem in contynowaunce alle þi liif-tyme.

& in þis tyme is þi loue boþe chaste & parfite. In þis tyme it is þat þou boþe seest þi God & þi loue, & nakidly felist hym also bi goostly onyng to his loue in þe souereyn poynte of þi spirit, as he is in hym-self, bot blyndely, as it may be here, vtterly 20 spoylid of þi-self & nakidly cloþed in hymself as he is, vncloþed & not lappid in any of þees sensible felynges (be þei neuer so sweet ne so holy) þat mowen falle in þis liif. Bot in purete of spirit propirly & parfitley he is parceyuid & felt in him-self as he is, fer lengþid fro any fantasye or fals opinion þat may falle in þis 25 liif.

þis siȝt & þis felyng of God, þus in hym-self as he is, may no more be departyd fro God in hym-self (to þin vnderstanding þat þus felist or þus seest) þen may be departyd God him-self fro his owne beyng, þe whiche ben bot one boþe in substaunce & also in 30

1 partye] parte Har² þerof] of yt Pa mowen] be felte add. Pa 2 þi]
the Pa 2-3 boþe in bygyng] om. Pa 3 bygyng] bygynnyng, nny
can. Har¹ &] yn Pa 4 of] on Pa 6 oft-] often- Pa &] ins. Pa
growyng] comyng add. Kk Har² Pa 7 his] is Har² Pa al] om. Pa
9 bi] þe add. Kk Har²; thy add. Pa 12 plesauntly] plyantly Pa 13 &]
of Har² Pa to] of Pa 14 onyng] onehede Pa 15 bliþe] fayne Kk
Har² Pa sensible] om. Pa 17 it is] tr. Pa 18 boþe] om. Pa
seest] both add. Pa 21 spoylid] spoled Har² 23 ne] or Pa so] om. Pa
25 lengþid] lengede Har² fro] from Pa 28 fro] from Pa 29 (or)
þus] ins. Pa God] yn add. Pa fro] from Pa

kynde. So þat as God may not be fro his beyng for onheed in
f. 109b kynde, so may not þat soule, | þat þus seeþ & felþ, be fro þat
þing þat he þus seeþ & feleþ for onheed in grace.

Lo! þus & by þees tokenes maist þou sumwhat fele, & in partie
5 proue, þe maner & þe worþines of þi cleping & þi steryng in grace
in þi goostly worching wiþ-inne, in þi redyng or hering of þis
mater wiþ-outen. & þan, fro þe tyme be þat þou, or eny oþer
liche vnto þee as in spirit, haue had verrey experience of alle þees
tokenes, or of eny of hem—for at þe first tyme þer ben bot ful
10 fewe þat ben so specialy touchid & merkyd wiþ þis grace þat þei
mowen haue sone or sodenly, in verrey felyng, þe proef of hem
alle; neuerþeles, it suffiseþ to haue sum one or two, þof a man
haue not alle at þe first tyme—& þerfore, ȝif þou felest þat þou
hast trewe experience of one or of two, prouid by trewe examyna-
15 cion of Scripture & of counsel & of concyence: þan it is speedful
to þee sumtyme for to cees of þees queinte meditacions & þees
sotyle ymagineacions of þe qualitees of þi beyng & of Goddes,
& of þe werkes of þi-self & of God (in þe whiche þi wittes han
ben fed & wiþ þe whiche þou hast ben led from wordlines &
20 bodelines to þat abilnes of grace þat þou arte inne) & for to
lerne how þou schalt be occupied goostly in felyng of þi-self & of
God, whom þou hast lernid so wel before by þenkyng & ymagen-
yng of ȝoure doynges.

Ensaumple of þis schewid Criste in þis liif. For whi, ȝif it so
25 had ben þat þer had ben none hier perfeccion in þis liif bot in
beholdyng & in louyng of his manheed, I trowe þat he wolde not
þan haue assendid vnto heuen whiles þis wored had lastid, ne
wiþdrawen his bodely presence from his specyal louers in erþe.

1 fro] from Pa onheed] ooned Kk in] ins. Pa 2 þat] this
Pa seeþ . . . felþ] tr. Pa be] fer add. Kk Har² Pa fro] from Pa
3 seeþ . . . feleþ] tr. Pa &] þus add. Kk Har² onheed] ooned Kk
5 (&) þi] om. Pa 6 -inne] & add. Kk Har² Pa 7 fro] from Pa
be] om. Pa 8 þees] those Pa 9 ful] om. Pa 11 felyng]
ins., profe can. Pa proef] ins., felyng can. Pa 12 to haue] om. Pa
14 hast] haue Kk Har² Pa trewe] om. Har² (or) of] om. Pa
15 &] om. Har² Pa 16 for] om. Pa &] or of Pa 18 werkes]
worke Pa 19 wiþ] ins., yn can. Pa from] fro Kk Har² 24 (in)
þis] his Pa whi] om. Pa ȝif it] it if Har² 24-5 so had] tr. Kk
Har² Pa 25 (bot) in] ins. Pa; þe add. Kk Har² Pa 26 in] þe Har²;
om. Pa; þe add. Kk -heed] -hode Har² 27 þan] om. Kk Pa
vnto] yn to Pa ne] ȝit add. Har² 28 from] fro Kk Har²

Bot for þer was an hier *perfecion*, þe whiche man may haue in þis liif (þat is to sey, a pure goostli felyng in þe loue of his God-
hood) þerfore he seide | to his disciples, þe whiche grocheden to f. 110a
forgo his bodely presence (as þou doost *in partie & in maner* to
forgo þi corious meditacions & þi queinte sotyl wittes) þat it was 5
speedful to hem þat he went bodely fro hem: *Expedit vobis ut*
ego vadam; þat is: 'It is speedful to ȝow þat I go bodely fro ȝow.'
Vpon þis worde seiþ þe doctour þus: 'þat bot ȝif þe schap of his
manheed be wiþdrawen from oure bodely iȝen, þe loue of his God-
hood may not fasten in oure goostly iȝen.' & þus sey I vnto þee, 10
þat it is speedful sumtyme to leue of þi corious worching in þi
wittes & leere þee to taast sumwhat, in þi felyng goostly, of þe loue
of þi God.

& to þis felyng schalt þou come bi þat wey þat I telle þee, by
helpe of grace goyng before. & þat is, þat þou euer-more wiþ- 15
outen cesyng lene to þe nakid felyng of þi-self, euermore offryng
þi being vnto God as for þe most *precious* offring þat þou maist
make. Bot loke, as I ofte seide, þat it be nakid for drede of
disceite. ȝif it be nakid, þan wol it be ful peynful to þee in þe
biginnynge to abide þer-in any while. & þat is, as I before seyde, 20
for þi wittys fynden no mete þer-in vnto hem. Bot no force
þer-of, for I wol loue it þe betyr. Late hem faste awhile, I preie
þee, from here kyndely delite in here kunning; for, as it is wel
seide, a man kyndely desireþ for to kunne; bot certes he may not
taast of goostly felyng *in* God bot only by grace, haue he neuer 25
so moche kunning of clergie ne of kynde. & þerfore, I preie þee,
seche more after felyng þen after kunning; for kunning oft-

1 for] bycawse Pa whiche] a add. Kk Har² Pa 2 in] of Kk Har²
Pa 3 grocheden] grutchynden Kk; for add. Kk Har² 4 maner]
for add. Kk Har² 5 forgo] go, for ins. Har² it] is Kk 6 to] for
Pa fro] from Pa 7 to] for Pa fro] from Pa 8 þat] om. Pa
9 from] fro Kk Har² 10 sey I] tr. Pa 11 þat] om. Pa it] ins.
Har² speedful] for the add. Pa sumtyme] for add. Pa of] om.
Pa 12 leere] lerne Har² Pa þee] om. Pa goostly] om. Pa
13 þi] om. Pa God] goostly add. Pa 14 to] vnto Pa by]
the (ins.) add. Pa 15 &] om. Pa 17 for] ins. Pa maist] canst
Pa 18 I] haue add. Pa ofte] haue add. Har² 19 þan] ins. Pa
wol it] yt wyl Pa ful] om. Pa in] at Pa 20 abide] byde Kk
21 vnto] for Pa 22 wol] wolde Har² Pa 23 from] fro Kk Har²
24 for] om. Pa kunne] knowe Pa certes] truly Pa 25 in] of Pa
26 ne] or Har² Pa of] ins. Pa 27 oft-] often- Har² Pa

tymes disceyuiþ wiþ pride, bot meek louely felyng may not begile. Sciencia inflat, karitas edificat. In knowyng is trauaile, in feling is rest.

Bot now mayst þou seye: What rest is þis þat þou spekist of?
 5 For me þenkiþ þat it is trauayle, pynynge, & no rest. For whan I
 f. 110b set me to do as I þou seyst, I fynde þer pyne & batayle on alle
 sides. For on þat o partye my wittys wolden haue me awey, & I
 wil not; & on þat oþer partye I wolde fele God & lake þe felyng
 of my-self, & I may not. So þat batayle is on alle sides & peyne;
 10 & þis þenk me a queynte rest þat þou spekist of.

To þis I answere and sey: þat þou arte not used in þis werk, &
 þerfore it is more peynful to þee. Bot ȝif þou were wonte þer-to,
 & knewest by experience what profite were þer-in, þou woldest
 15 not wilfully come oute þer-of to haue alle þe bodely ioie & rest of
 þis woredl. & ȝit it is grete peyne & a trauayle also. Bot in þat
 I clepe it a rest, for þe soule is not in dwere what it schal do, and
 also for a soule is maad sekir (I mene in þe tyme of þis doyng)
 þat it schal not moche erre.

2 begile] as scripture says add. Har² knowyng] kunyng Har²
 4 þis] ins. Pa 5 þat] om. Pa 7 on] om. Har² þat] the Pa
 8 þat] the Pa lake] want Kk Har² Pa 10 þis] thus Pa; me add. Pa
 me] yt Pa 12 peynful] pynefull Har² 13 knewest] know Kk
 profite] prophet Kk 14 ioie . . . rest] tr. Kk Har² Pa 15 a] om. Pa
 16 in] dowȝte nor add. Pa dwere] were Kk Har² 17 maad sekir]
 sykered Kk Har² Pa

Curriculum Vitae

Marianne J.P. Sommers (18 August 1959) grew up on the farm of her parents and grandparents in a spiritually rich environment at 'De Krim', Elsendorp (Gemert), the Netherlands.

She studied English/American literature and linguistics at the Radboud University Nijmegen (formerly the Catholic University Nijmegen, KUN) for which she graduated in 1987. In 1988 she graduated at the same faculty on 'Guilt and Spiritual Isolation' within the works of William Styron (1988) (Philology). In 1990 she finished her additional interdisciplinary masters of educational studies. In 1995 she wrote a thesis on Spirituality, entitled 'Self-Denial and Spirituality within the Book of Privy Counseling' at the faculty of Theology. In 2002 she graduated on Religious Science/Theology on her thesis titled '*Geestelijke begeleiding als spiritueel communicatief proces binnen de grote wereldgodsdiesten*', which can be translated as: 'Spiritual Guidance as a Spiritually Communicative Process' within the leading World Religions: D/Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Since 1987 she has worked as a lecturer of English, Dutch, Ethics, Social and Communicative Skills and as a student coach and counsellor, first within secondary education and later at the Fontys University of Engineering and Economics. Nowadays she is engaged as a lecturer of Philosophy & Ethics and Research skills. She is also engaged as a student counsellor & (graduation) supervisor at the Fontys University of Social Studies Eindhoven.

On 10 December 2007 she started her doctorate-Ph.D. research on *The Book of Privy Counseling* which she considers as the most precious work she has ever been involved in and which she has accomplished.

On 25 June 1988 she married with Hans Heuer, with whom she received two daughters, Hannelore (1994) and Elianne (1997). Nowadays they live in Boxmeer and Nijmegen.

Goostly freende in god
 as touchynge ym in
 wais carpacion as me
 vnde yee dispositio. I speke
 at yis tyme in special to y
 self. & not to alle yoo v
 yis wytynge scholen heye in ge
 neral. **F**or zif I schulde wri
 te unto alle. van I must
 write yng vnt we're acce
 dyng to alle generall. **N**ot
 sy I at yis tyme schal wri
 te unto yee in special: yef
 fore I write none oþer yng.
 Bot soche as me vnde v
 most speedful & according
 to ym dispositio only. **I**f
 ey of be so dispositio as y
 arte to whom yis wytynge
 may profit as unto yee:
 in so moche ye beter for I
 am wel apaied. **N**eithe
 les at yis tyme ym owne
 inward dispositio is only
 by it self as I may concei
 ue it. ye poyncte & ye pynk
 of my beholding. **A**nd y
 fore to yee in pson of all
 oþer leche unto yee: I sei
 yus. **W**han v^u comyst bi
 yis self vnde. not before
 what you schalt do after.

Bot forsale as wel god
 yonges as fuel yonges
 and pley not wþ ym mouy.
 Bot yee list ynt wel. and
 van zif you ouȝt schalt sey.
 loke not how mochel ne
 how litel yat it be. ne chay
 ge not what it is. ne what
 it bement. **W**e it orson. **W**e
 it psall. ympre or autune
 or any op pleyer. tenor al or
 special. **C**ontra. wþ mne
 enditid bi yonge. or vocale
 wþ ouȝt by piononysing of
 worde. **A**nd loke yat novis
 leue in ym worchung mynde.
 Bot anaken entent spreching
 into god. not delyd i any
 special yonge of god in hy
 self. how he is in him self.
 or in any of his wekles.
 Bot only yat he is as he is
Nat hym be so I pley pec &
 make hym on none op wi
 se. leche no feij in hym by
 soritee of wytte. yat byleue
 by ym glounde. **W**is naked
 tent frechly fastend & glou
 nd in reþer belseue. schal
 be yonge ell to ym yonge &
 to ym feling. Bot anaken
 yonge & alkynde feling of